PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

NOVEMBER 09

e Official Magazine

REVIEW GRUDGE MATCHES

GAME VS GAME battles in music, racing, hockey and fighting

WORLD FIRST REVIEW

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 25 (November 2009)

UNCHARTED 2

Forget game of the year. This is one of the best games of **all time**

WHITE-HOT INTEL

Modern Warfare 2

Assassin's Creed 2

GTA: Chinatown Wars

Rage

NEW PS3!

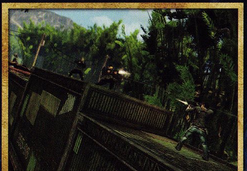
FRESH LOOK

KILLER PRICE

FULL INFO INSIDE PG 8

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

ADVENTURE NEVER



UNCHARTED 2: A
than it's ever bee
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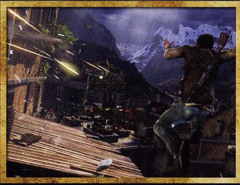
expansive travers

Animation Blending is a core feature of NDI tec
allows up to 20 or 30 layered animations to play on
all at once. This gives the player complete contr
character while maintaining fluid movement and w
limited to a fixed number of predetermined



The processing p
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UNCHARTED 2: A

R LOOKED BETTER.

Among Thieves pushes the PlayStation 3 further
en pushed, delivering a truly engaging story
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sal move set.

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animations.

ower in UNCHARTED: Drake's Fortune allowed
cts to be displayed on screen at once whereas
mongThieves can display over 500.

Characters now have over 30,000 polygons each.

New Naughty Dog Engine 2.0 allows Drake and all enemies and allies to be placed on large scale objects (crumbling buildings, moving trains, etc.) that move through the environment and break apart, while still maintaining full control.

Maximizing the Cell processor has allowed Naughty Dog to add an unsurpassed amount of detail to UNCHARTED 2's environments and characters bringing a new level of realism and a depth of emotion never before seen in a video game.

the best of E3 GAME CRITICS AWARD 09 WINNER

Best of Show

ign.com BEST OF E3 WINNER 2009

PS3 Game of Show

1UP.COM BEST OF E3 WINNER 2009

Best of Show

GAMESPOT E3'09 EDITORS' CHOICE WINNER

Best PS3 Game

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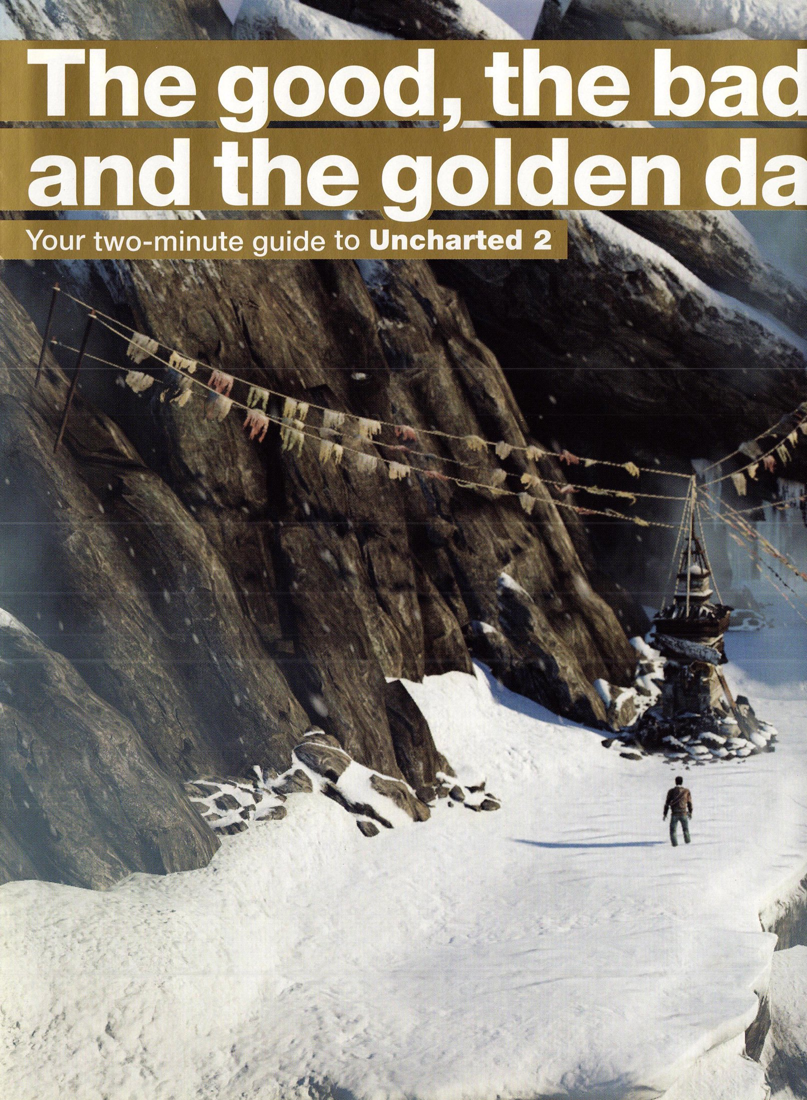
Game of Show

The good, the bad and the golden da

Your two-minute guide to **Uncharted 2**



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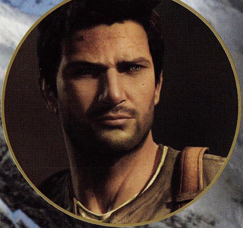
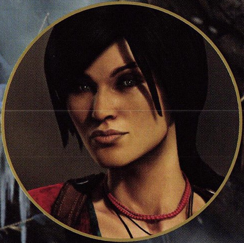


Nathan Drake

Drake is driven more by the thrill of the hunt than by the treasure itself. He may or may not be a descendant of Sir Francis Drake, the great 16th-century explorer and privateer—but regardless of his lineage, Drake is gifted with a remarkable historical imagination and an uncanny ability to reconstruct events from only the barest evidence.



Chloe Frazer

As tough and capable as she is beautiful, she's equally comfortable in a gunfight or a fistfight—whatever the occasion demands. She's a good partner, but her moral compass is uncertain, and her reckless and impulsive nature makes her somewhat unpredictable.

What all the fuss is about

The Phurba Dagger is an ancient Nepalese artifact that may hold the key to unlock a fortune greater than anyone has ever known.

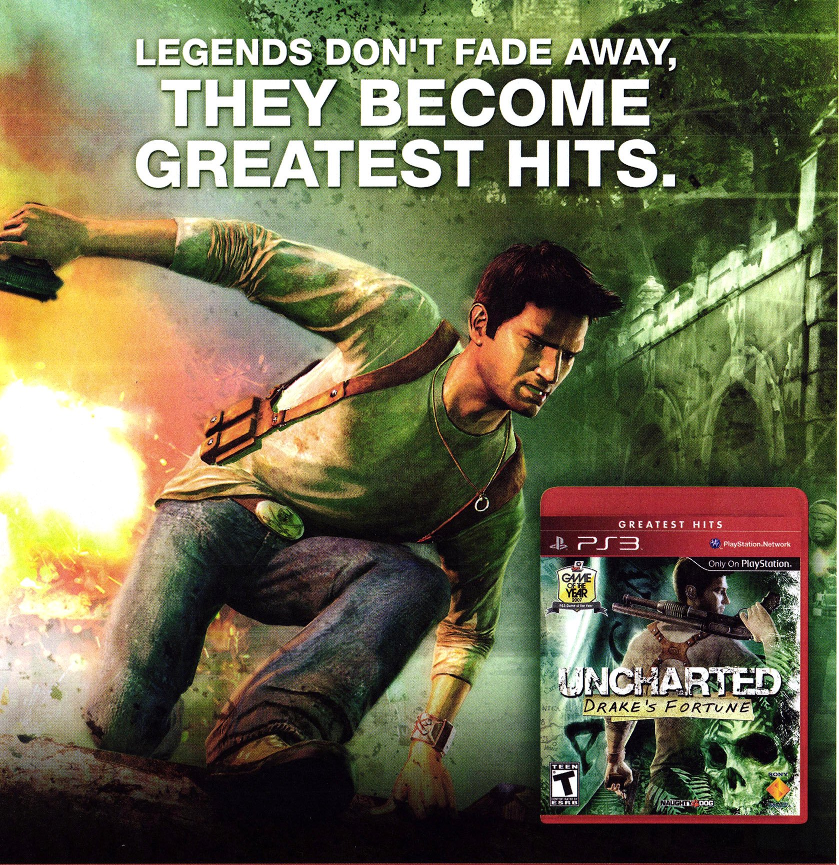
Elena Fisher

She has a playful, likeable personality, but most of all Elena is a never-give-up kind of character, determined to such a degree that it is both her greatest virtue and her greatest fault. She's passionate about the mysteries she investigates, but is still searching for the big story that will put her on the map as a serious journalist.

Zoran Lazarevìc

Brutal, relentless, and seeking the power of such notable historical super-villains as Genghis Khan and Hitler, Zoran displays contempt for everything but his own crazed ambition. His ruthless dedication to personal glory means he will bulldoze—intimidate, threaten, and execute—anything and anyone who stands in his way.

Don't stop! Now read our exclusive, 10-page review blowout on page 42


GREATEST HITS
PS3
PlayStation Network
Only On PlayStation
GAME OF THE YEAR 2007
PS3 Game of the Year
UNCHARTED
DRAKE'S FORTUNE
TEEN
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LEGENDS DON'T FADE AWAY, THEY BECOME GREATEST HITS.

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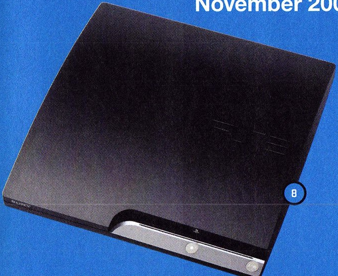
Contents

November 2009 **PlayStation** The Official Magazine

🟥 PlayStation 3 🟧 PlayStation Portable 🟩 PlayStation Network ☐ PlayStation 2



Features

42 UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES
Drake's back. But is he as suave as ever? Our exclusive review reveals EVERYTHING.

52 CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2
A hands-on look at the shooter that will dominate your PS3 this holiday.

56 GAMES GO HOLLYWOOD
The biggest gaming franchises are headed to the silver screen.

58 ASSASSIN'S CREED II
Making a killer game even better the second time around.

Update

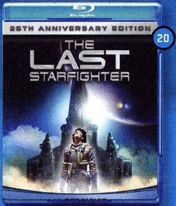
6 The 10: What you need to know

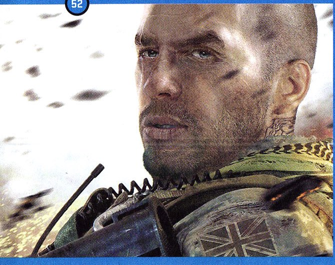
6 Arrgh! Delayed 'til 2010!

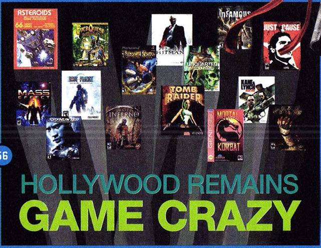
8 **THE NEW PS3**

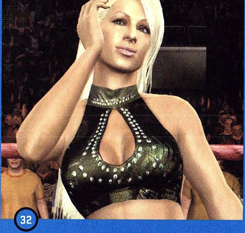
16 PTOM Interview: Jonathan Knight

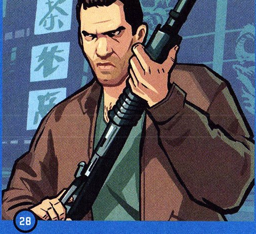
20 **BLU-RAY REVIEWS**


25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
THE LAST STARFIGHTER
20



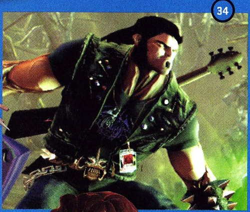

56
HOLLYWOOD REMAINS
GAME CRAZY





Previews

41 Beaterator
34 **BRÜTAL LEGEND**
40 Dragon Ball: Raging Blast
28 **GTA: CHINATOWN WARS**
36 Mars
38 Max Payne 3
41 Naruto Shippuden: Legends: Akatsuku Rising
30 Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising
24 Rage
40 Way of the Samurai 3
32 **WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2010**



Reviews

82 Afrika
76 Dirt 2
78 Fate/Unlimited Codes
73 Guitar Hero 5
80 Heroes Over Europe
84 Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do to Deserve This?
70 Madden NFL 10
82 Mana Khemia: Fall of Alchemy
84 Mini Ninjas
77 Need for Speed SHIFT
74 NHL 10
75 NHL 2K10
68 **NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2**
80 Shin Megami Tensei: Persona
78 Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny
72 **THE BEATLES: ROCK BAND**
66 **WOLFENSTEIN**

Network

86 **Recession Buster**
How to game when you're broke
89 PlayStation Network Corner
Video Delivery Service, Reviews, Previews, Downloads
92 Letters
96 Qore

Editor's Note

"Facts are meaningless. You could use facts to prove anything that's even remotely true!"

I'm not going to make you guess the quote above—it's from Homer Simpson, a man who has given us many of the great one-liners of all time. And although Homer has built a 20-year career out of being an absolute moron, he's 100-percent right in this case. This issue of *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* is a perfect example: it's full to bursting with over-powering facts that prove undeniable truths.

> “And I'm going to just go ahead and declare it a fact that *Uncharted 2* is going to be a smash hit—although I'll admit that's a *very* safe bet...”

We'll get the lone unpleasant fact out of the way first: Sharp-eyed readers will notice something different about this page. Namely, the charming and delightful Rob Smith has vacated his Editor-in-Chief throne here at PTOM and moved on to his next great adventure. Rob has served in the business for something like 16 years and has been a good friend of mine for the last 10, so don't bother writing in to tell us he'll be missed—*believe* me, we know.

Now for a happier fact: Rob won't disappear entirely from these pages. The lure of writing exclusive first reviews of games like *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves,* this month's cover game, is too strong. It's also a fact that *Uncharted 2* is a PlayStation 3 exclusive, if you're keeping score. And I'm going to just go ahead and declare it a fact that *Uncharted 2* is going to be a smash hit—although I'll admit that's a *very* safe bet, so I get no points for bravery on that one.

It's a fact that Sony has just unleashed a newly redesigned PS3 with the tantalizingly tempting price tag of only $299. And it's a fact that this price point is going to attract a ton more gamers to the console this holiday season. So will eagerly anticipated games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* and *Assassin's Creed II,* both of which are show-cased in these very pages. And while some would call that just an educated opinion, I'm nonetheless totally right, so it's also a fact.

Finally, I suppose I should introduce myself. I'm Eric Bratcher, your interim Editor in Chief. If my name sounds familiar, there's a good chance you've been a PlayStation gamer for a long time. I wrote for this very mag from April 2002 to October 2005, back when it was called *PSM: 100% Unofficial PlayStation Magazine.* And even though I love my current gig as the Executive Editor of GamesRadar.com, there was no way I was going to turn down an invitation to come back and visit the old homestead for awhile—especially when that means being here during such an exciting time in the PS3's life cycle. The ultimate truth is that PlayStation 3 has never been more exciting than it is right now, this very second. And that, my friends, is a fact.

100% PLAYSTATION 2 MAGAZINE
PSM
DEVIL MAY CRY 2
THE LEGEND OF DRAGOON
PlayStation
2005 HOLIDAY BUYERS GUIDE
PSM
KONG!
PlayStation The Official Magazine
UNCHARTED 2

The more things change, the more they stay the same. PlayStation still rocks and the guy with the funny hairdo is still around, begging Sony for a sequel to its classic RPG, *The Legend of Dragoon.*

"Quote" contest

As they say, all good things come to an end. And so it is with the Ed Note Quote Contest. Yes, last month was the final installment of our regularly scheduled Blu-ray giveaway, but rest assured there will be more PTOM contests to come in the future. Still, someone has to win the final Quote Contest, and that person is Jose Rosa of Killeen, TX, who identified last month's quote from *Highlander.* Congratulations, Jose!

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

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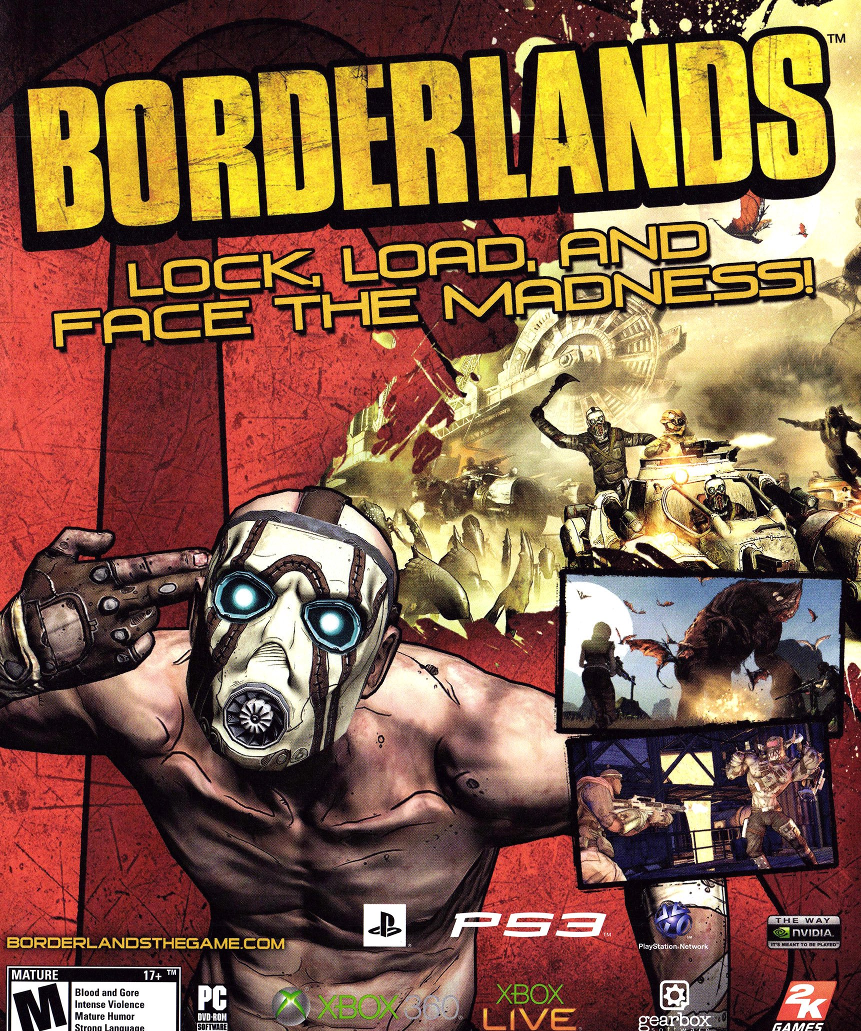
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THE 10

What you need to know

EXPECTED: Fall 2009
DELAYED
UNTIL: Early 2010

2 The *NEW* PS3
page 8

3 Indepth with the PSPgo
page 9

4 More *Tekken 6*...
page 10

5 and *Final Fantasy XIV* reveals!
page 11

6 Hardware: We got the beat!
page 12

7 Nerd Wars! Developer vs. Fan
page 14

8 Interview: *Dante's* Jonathan Knight
page 16

9 Games: Too long or too short?
page 18

10 Burning Question: Dev's Pet Peeves?
page 19

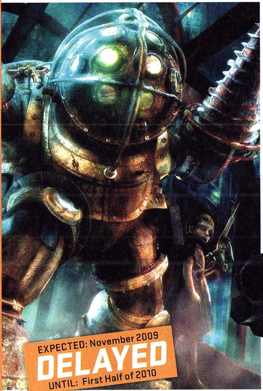
Heavy Rain ▲

WHY WAS IT PUSHED?

"Publishers today realize it's not ideal to release a new IP or genre just before Christmas. It's very crowded." That's the co-CEO of *Heavy Rain's* development studio, Quantic Dream, in an interview with GamesIndustry.biz. He's right—we're sick of rushing through a dozen huge games in the span of a few weeks and then surviving on table scraps for the next 10 months. By moving to early 2010, however, *Heavy Rain* just ends up facing off against other exclusives like *God of War III.*

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?

Heavy Rain plans to emphasize storytelling and character development above all else, and that's a focus that is sadly missing from today's trigger-happy testosterone pr0n. A mature film-noir mystery would have been a welcome respite from all the super soldiers shooting each other this fall.



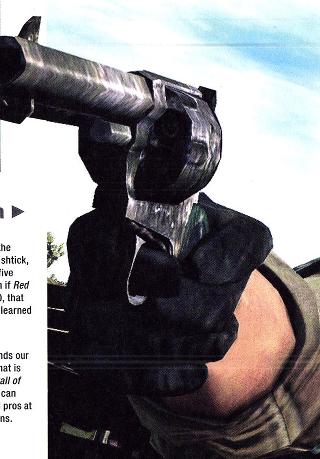
◀ BioShock 2

WHY WAS IT PUSHED?

The publisher of *Bioshock 2,* Take-Two, "felt that it was essential to invest the additional time to ensure that the title will deliver what its fans expect and deserve." Unofficially? The sequel's being worked on by at least four different development studios simultaneously: in northern California, Canada, Australia, and France. If you're thinking communication, management, and organization could be a problem here, you're thinking the same thing we're thinking.

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?

Shooters will still be around this holiday, and a few—like *Modern Warfare 2*—could be spectacular. Without *BioShock 2,* however, where will we find bullets mixed with brains...and also tornados of fire?



Red Dead Redemption ▶

WHY WAS IT PUSHED?

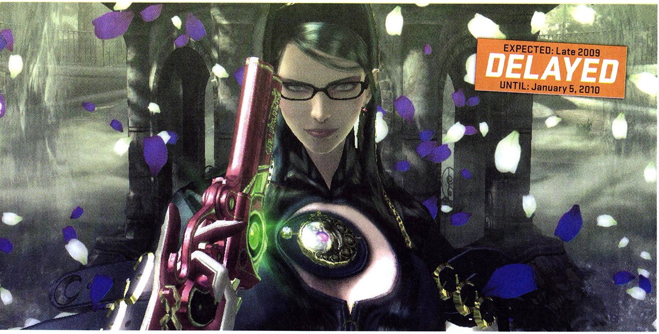
Officially, the wait is "to maximize the full potential of the player experience and market performance." Same old shtick, basically. Considering the sequel was only announced five months ago, however, no one should be surprised. Even if *Red Dead Redemption* doesn't come out until February 2010, that would still be a mere year since we (officially, anyway) learned of its existence.

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?

"Grand Theft Auto in the Wild West" is a phrase that sends our imagination and anticipation into overdrive, to a level that is only trumped by the phrase *"GTA* in space." Although *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood* already proved that this setting can work wonderfully, we want to see what the open-world pros at Rockstar can get out of horses, six shooters, and saloons.

1 WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO 2009?

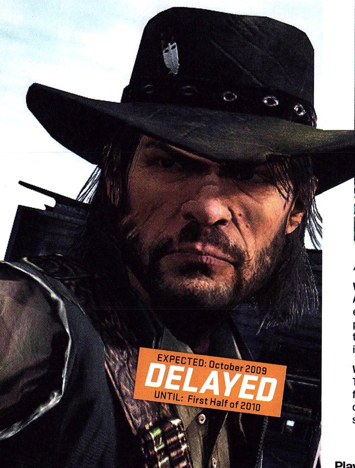
Horror. One after another, dozens of titles—delayed! Holiday 2009 has sunk from cheery to bleary. Here are the games we'll miss the most.

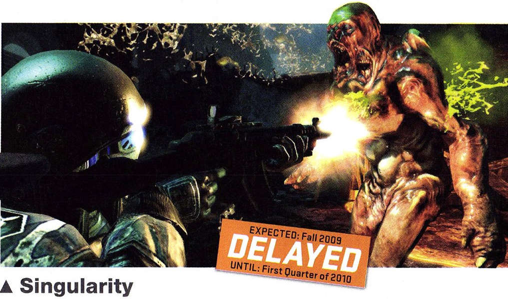


◀ Bayonetta

WHY WAS IT PUSHED?
We asked Keith Dwyer, producer of *Bayonetta,* and the official line is that 2009's holiday lineup was just too damn crowded. Other action games "beat them to the punch," and spacing *Bayonetta* in early 2010 gives it a much better chance to stand out. Dwyer also thinks gamers will have gift cards burning a hole in their pocket come January.

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?
We've played bits of *Bayonetta* and love how intentionally cheesy and over-the-top the action gets. What other game stars a shape-shifting witch who poses and winks at the camera while pulverizing a giant into the next dimension using a weapon made of her own hair?





▲ Singularity

WHY WAS IT PUSHED?
An Activision spokesperson explained that "the excitement for [developer] Infinity Ward's *Modern Warfare 2* exceeded our expectations and therefore we have decided to move [developer] Raven's upcoming sci-fi first person action title." Wow. The folks at Infinity Ward must be pretty damn pleased with themselves. Apparently, they've put together a game with so much commercial potential that almost every single one of their competitors is giving up and clearing the holiday field in advance—even "competing" games from the same publisher.

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?
Two reasons. First, it would've been nice to have more shooter options this holiday season. Second, we suddenly feel as if we need to lower our expectations for *Singularity* and any other title that runs to 2010 just to escape competition. If the publisher doesn't think its original property can stand toe-to-toe with an established name, why should we? Then we look at our *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* feature on page 50, and we understand.

Reprinted from gamesradar

2 THIN FOR THE WIN?

The long-rumored revamped PS3 has finally arrived! But where does the community stand on the PS3's new form? We turned to Twitter (twitter.com/P_TOM) to get our readers' reactions

losingreality7: I love that finally Sony is doing good on their fans. It looks better and is priced just perfect. Now just keep it up!

BlueHeeler75: Competitively priced, great design, I might buy it to have a 2nd PS3 in another room.

TFWM_: I think it looks cool enough, but it's the new 120GB hard drive I like. Overall, I think it's a good job.

Growngeek: I prefer the look of phatty, but if this is what it took to get the price down then more power to Sony.

PLEASE
DON'T THROW YOUR CIGARETTE END ON THE FLOOR THE COCKROACHES ARE GETTING CANCER

narutolover9: Yeah... idk. Since it doesn't have backward compatibility, I won't get it.

KingQuagmire: For me the jury is out until I can compare both of them side by side.

Joe Gizzle: Sony threw the hammer down by putting out the Slim @ such a great price. All we need now is a date for *GT5.*

MiiAmigo: I love it... But, why not include the stand with it? It makes the difference for me.

aodific: The PS3 Slim is a great redesign of the PS3. However, due to the closeness in price, people may get it over the PSPgo.

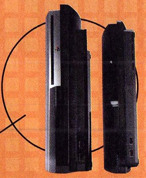
alexbhp: Owning 2 fat PS3s w/ BC [backwards compatibility], I wont buy 1 but I think the slim in an important milestone for Sony & PS brand. I love it!

Info A-go-go

The new PS3 is basically the original PS3 but thinner, lighter, and quieter. All of the primary functionality—such as Blu-ray playback and built-in Wi-Fi—remains intact, but there have been a few smaller tweaks here and there. Here are all the specifics on Sony's slick new SKU (and if you don't see the information you're looking for below, you can safely assume that particular aspect of the slim PS3 is the same as the original PS3).

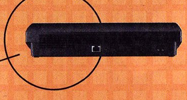
Price: $299

AVAILABLE: September 1
SIZE: 33-percent smaller, 36-percent lighter
LOOK: Matte finish, less chrome, new PS3 logo etched into top and bottom



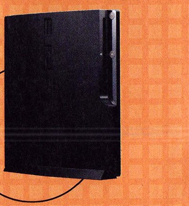
Features

- 120GB hard drive
- 2 USB ports
- Actual buttons for power and disc ejection
- Removable hard drive, now in the front
- Internal power transformer (no Xbox-style power brick)



Pruned features

- PS2 Backwards compatibility (already absent in current "fat" PS3 models)
- The ability to install third-party operating systems like Linux
- The master power switch on the back of the console
- The flash card readers (almost never used anyway)



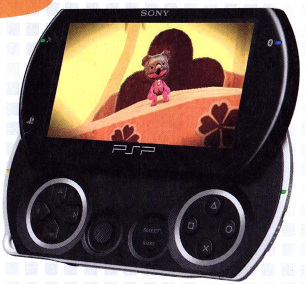
Extra info

- Packaged with composite cables only (no HDMI or component)
- Ships with new firmware version 3.0, which features a "What's new on PSN?" tab in the XMB, dynamic themes, a permanent PSN ID status box, and a new batch of icons
- Requires an add-on stand ($24) to ensure vertical stability, though it will stand vertically, albeit precariously, on its own.
- If you hook the new PS3 up to a Sony Bravia TV with an HDMI cable, you can control the XMB with your TV remote and the system will power down when you turn off the TV.

3

Which should YOU buy?

The new PSPgo versus the PSP-3000



SONY
HOME
POWER
HOLD
SELECT
START
PSP

PSPgo $249

VS.

PSP-3000 $169

Perks

- It's lighter, fits into your pocket (if you have loose pockets), and has a cool-looking design.
- It's got a system-wide Pause option, so you can halt your game at any time, exit to the XMB, play some music, watch a movie, or download a new game, and then pick Resume to continue your game where you left off.
- It has a built-in 16 GB internal hard drive. Need more space? You can purchase Memory Stick Micro (M2) to use in the new M2 memory card slot.
- You'll *theoretically* be able to transfer your old UMDs onto your PSPgo. However, details about this process haven't yet been divulged.
- Hook your PSPgo to your PS3, then plug your PS3 controller into your PSPgo, and you'll be able to play PSP games on your PS3.

Downsides

- It's $249 bucks! You got that much?
- Your old Memory Stick PRO Duo won't be compatible with the new PSPgo.
- You might *not* be able to play all your old, UMD-based games. Sony has said it's *looking into* some sort of transfer capability, but it hasn't officially announced any solution yet.
- Comes in only two colors: black and white.

It's your best choice if:

- You traded your launch day iPhone 3G for an iPhone 3GS less than a year later. (You early adopter technophile, you!)
- You want to carry a robust gaming device and look slick busting it out wherever you go.
- You haven't upgraded from a PSP-1000 yet and have a lot of spare change.

Shared Features

- Both have direct access to the PSN Store, so you can purchase games and movies with just your PSP and a Wi-Fi connection.
- Both will give you access to at least most of the games in the PSP library. They just might not be in the same format (UMD versus digital download).
- Both have similar battery life.

Perks

- It's way cheaper. You might even already own one.
- It has a slightly bigger screen than the PSPgo.
- You can purchase a 32GB Memory Stick Pro Duo ($70 or so) to store your digital game purchases.
- You have a variety of styles and packages to pick from, including the silver *Ratchet & Clank* pack and the lilac Hannah Montana pack.

Downsides

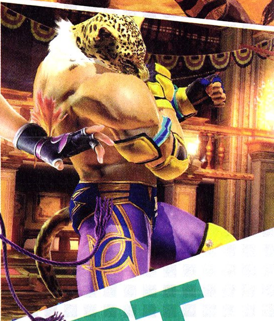
- It's bigger, bulkier, and heavier.
- You won't be able to transfer your old UMDs onto a Memory Stick PRO Duo, so if you want to play your old games without carrying a stack of UMDs, you'll have to repurchase them, assuming they're available in the PlayStation Store.
- You have to purchase a Memory Stick Pro Duo to take advantage of digital downloads.

It's your best choice if:

- You're trying to raise a family in a bear economy or your parents don't give you much allowance. (In other words, you're on a budget.)
- You don't already own a lot of UMDs, so you won't be sad that you can't transfer them onto a Memory Stick.
- You actually want a girly, pastel-colored console with a Disney princess' face stamped on the box.

4 TEKKEN 6

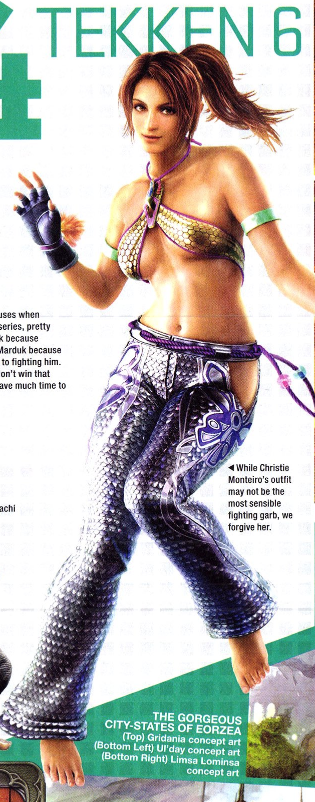
◄ Marduk



Tekken Charge

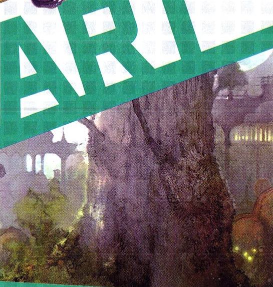
Executive Producer Katsuhiro Harada on which character he uses when playing *Tekken 6:* "I've always used Heihachi throughout the series, pretty much. But recently I haven't been able to win so much at work because everyone is so good at the game. So I've kind of switched to Marduk because not that many people at work use Marduk so they're not used to fighting him. So I'll use the tackle and the pounding a lot. But even now, I don't win that often. I'm really busy, you know, directing the game. I don't have much time to keep up. I'm getting older."

◄ Heihachi

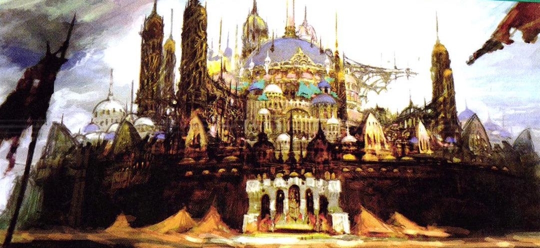


◄ While Christie Monteiro's outfit may not be the most sensible fighting garb, we forgive her.

ART

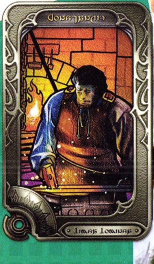


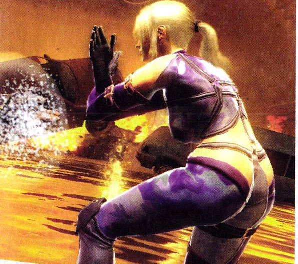
THE GORGEOUS CITY-STATES OF EORZEA
(Top) Gridania concept art
(Bottom Left) Ul'day concept art
(Bottom Right) Limsa Lominsa concept art

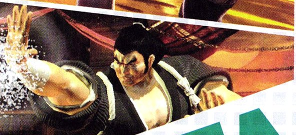


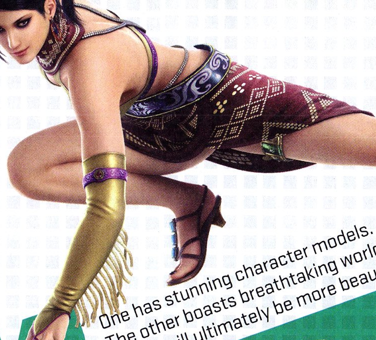
Guildleves ►

Guildleves are pretty metal plates of stained crystal. Each serves a unique function, like granting access to teleportation devices or activating certain quests. Guildmasters pass them out to guild members, which lets players create personalized quest campaigns.







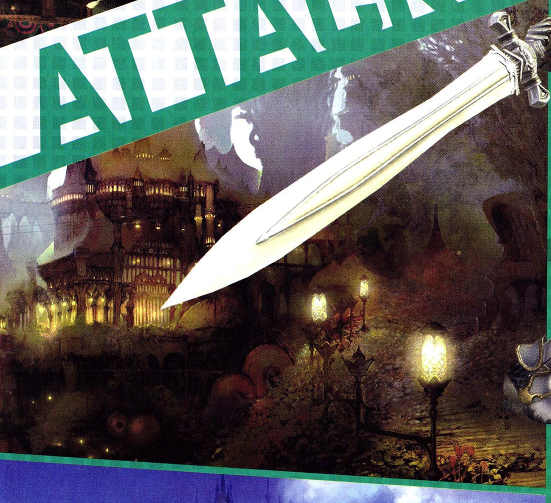


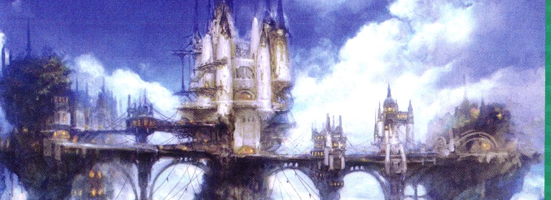
Tomb guardian ▶ Zafina follows the ideals of astrology. "So... what's your sign?"

◀ Nina Williams faces off against Dennis Rodman... er, Raven to determine who looks better in purple.

ATTACK!

One has stunning character models. The other boasts breathtaking worlds. Which will ultimately be more beautiful?



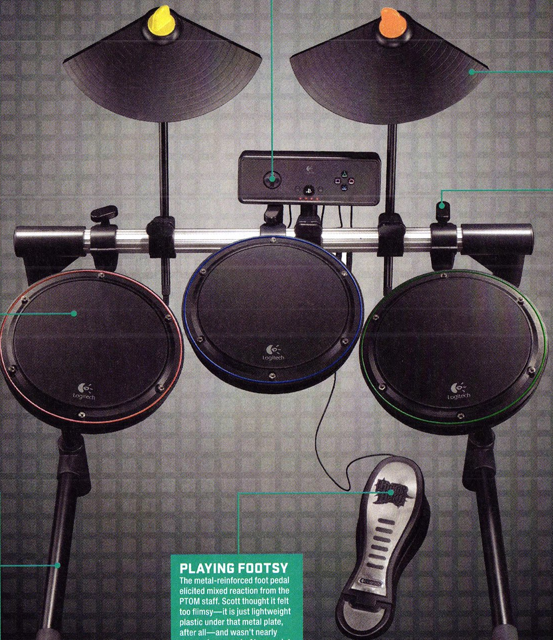


5

FINAL FANTASY XIV

6 BEAT IT

Do you remember our review of the truly excellent ION Drum Rocker that ran way back in our March issue? Do you remember being severely disappointed by the fact that such a well-constructed drum peripheral was great for *Rock Band 2,* but not entirely compatible with *Guitar Hero: World Tour?* Well, just in time for *Guitar Hero 5,* Logitech offers an alternative choice in the form of its own high-end Wireless Drum Controller, which is compatible with both major music game franchises. Unfortunately, despite the fact that it's a full $70 cheaper than the Drum Rocker at "only" $229, you might just come away disappointed in an entirely different way.



COMPLETE CONTROL

The boxy controller module may look a bit oversized, but it serves its function well: it connects wirelessly with the PS3, it instantly syncs regardless of what you're playing, and it remains reliable throughout your play time. It also enables all of the drum wiring to dangle neatly in the back, out of the way. Just be sure to set its clip backwards; otherwise, it will extend over the cymbal clips and prevent you from attaching them (took us a second to solve that little problem).

WE'D HIT IT

The responsive, realistic-feeling drum pads are the one irrefutably awesome part of this drum kit (although they both look and feel exactly like the pads on the ION kit). However, you can only adjust their angle relative to the floor by about two or three inches, and the bar they're mounted on isn't wide enough to allow you to change the spacing at all. Oh, and you can't adjust their height relative to one another. So you're basically stuck with three nearly flat pads in a perfect row...Where's the realism in that?

A FAMILIAR FEELING

Logitech's cymbals function fine, but they aren't really any more satisfying than those found on Activision's first party drum kit. Actually, when you consider the layout of this set (and the fact that you really can't adjust it in any way), Logitech's whole controller feels more or less like the generic *Guitar Hero* drum kit but with nicer ingredients: better pads, a stronger frame, and so on.

UNHINGED

Every piece of the drum set attaches to the frame via these little black clips... and we hate them with a passion. You can't simply slide the clips around on the frame. They are grooved and must lock into the grooves of the frame. Therefore, you have to detach them entirely in order to rotate them and reposition the pads. It's not only inconvenient, it prevents you from placing the pads and cymbals as you might like.

A LEG UP

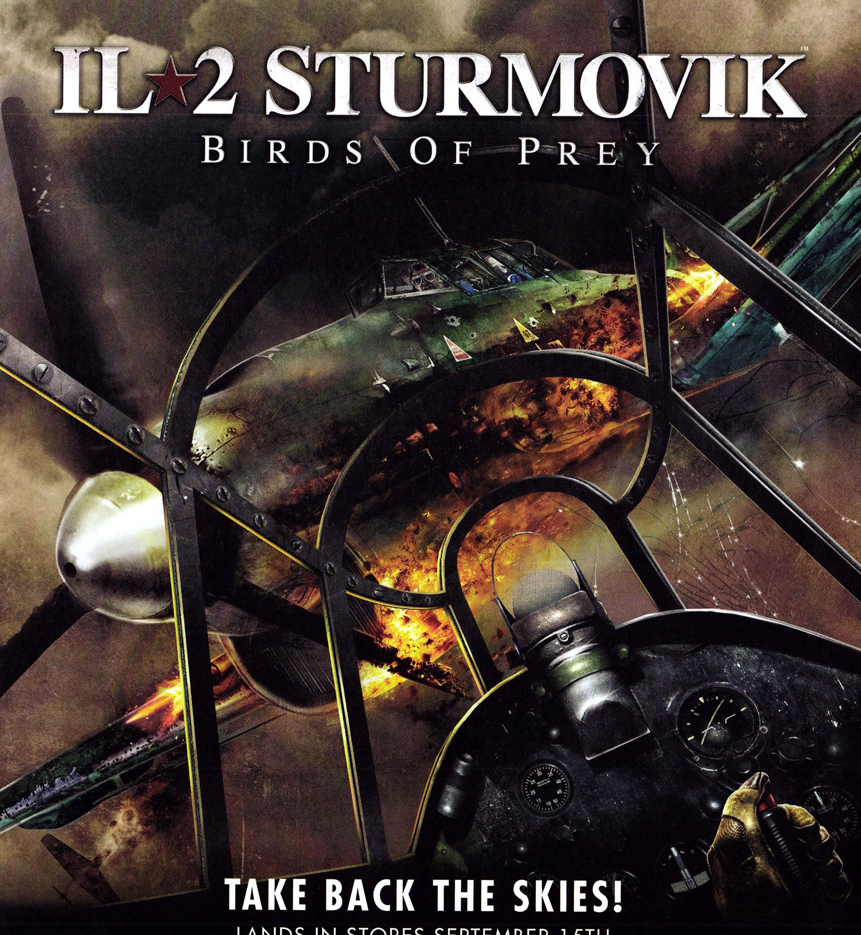
We could never quite figure it out, but for some reason, you cannot lock the frame's legs into place. So anytime you bump a piece of the set, the entire thing shifts. It never became a problem (the set didn't implode when we pounded on it during gameplay or anything like that), but the set still feels needlessly unstable. Also, even when we adjusted the frame to its maximum height, the set felt awfully short. We were fine sitting on a drum throne, but anything taller could have presented some problems.

PLAYING FOOTSY

The metal-reinforced foot pedal elicited mixed reaction from the PTOM staff. Scott thought it felt too flimsy—it is just lightweight plastic under that metal plate, after all—and wasn't nearly responsive enough. At one point, he compared it to stepping on a balloon. Roger, on the other hand, loved the fact that it's so much quieter than the Drum Rocker's kick pedal. To each his own, right?

IL★2 STURMOVIK™

BIRDS OF PREY



TAKE BACK THE SKIES!

LANDS IN STORES SEPTEMBER 15TH

PS3 PSP XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE NINTENDO DS Gaijin entertainment 1C 1C COMPANY 505 GAMES

TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
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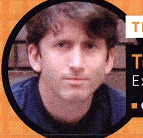
7 THE QUIZ: FAN VS. DEVELOPER

Who knows more about a game—its developer or a fan? PTOM puts each to the test to find out. This month: *Fallout 3!*



THE DEVELOPER

Todd Howard

Executive Producer, Bethesda

- Quizzed in person at QuakeCon

THE SETUP

TODD HOWARD: "You're asking me questions about Fallout 3?"

PTOM: Yes.

"But the game is so big…it's a year old for me now. Wait a minute… in a couple of weeks it will be a year since we finished the game. This might be hard."

We're sure you'll be fine.

"I don't know…"

THE QUIZ

1 Which of the following books increases your character's Melee Weapons skill?

GROGNAK
THE BARBARIAN

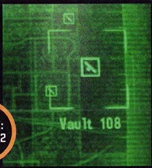
- A U.S. Army: 30 Handy Flamethrower Recipes
- B Chinese Army: Special Ops Training Manual
- C Grognak the Barbarian
- D Pugilism Illustrated

"Grognak the Barbarian." [Without hearing any of the multiple choice answers…]

Correct!

SCORE: 1 out of 1

2 In which Vault will you find Gary…and Gary…and Gary…and Gary?



- A Vault 87
- B Vault 92
- C Vault 106
- D Vault 108

"Hmm…[pause] 102?"

No.

"Okay…[pause] 96."

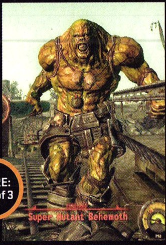
No.

"Hmm…[pause] 108?

Ding-ding-ding! But unfortunately, that wasn't your first guess. Remember kids, multiple choice questions are easier if you listen to the choices before answering.

SCORE: 1 out of 2

3 Besides the Gold Trophy for finding all 20 Vault-Tec Bobbleheads, what does the one other Gold Trophy in the original game (not counting DLC) require you to do?



- A Kill 5 Super Mutants Behemoths
- B Make one of every custom weapon
- C Discover every location on your map
- D Reach level 20

"Okay, I'm going to have to hear the multiple choice options here."

Hmm…

"Reach level 20?"

No.

"Okay, finish the main game?"

No.

"Oh."

Yeah.

"So what is it?"

Kill the…

"Mutant Behemoths…of course."

SCORE: 1 out of 3

4 What's the name of the Ghoul living in Warrington Station who's plotting a way to get residence inside Tenpenny Tower?

- A Billy Creel
- B Three Dog
- C Roy Philips
- D Dr. Zimmer

"I know this."

We thought you would.

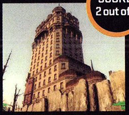
"Give me a moment…"

Take as long as you like.

"Yeah…Roy…" "Philips, Roy Philips."

Ding-ding-ding!

SCORE: 2 out of 4



5 What happens the first time you enter Canterbury Commons?

- A You meet the friendly Super Mutant, Fawkes
- B You see two "superheroes," The AntAgonizer and The Mechanist fighting
- C You discover a cave full of little children running around
- D You see a merchant hauling a cart of Human Flesh

"I need to hear the options for this one."

Here they are…

"Oh, B."

Correct.

FINAL SCORE: 3 out of 5

THE FAN

Kyle Stainsby

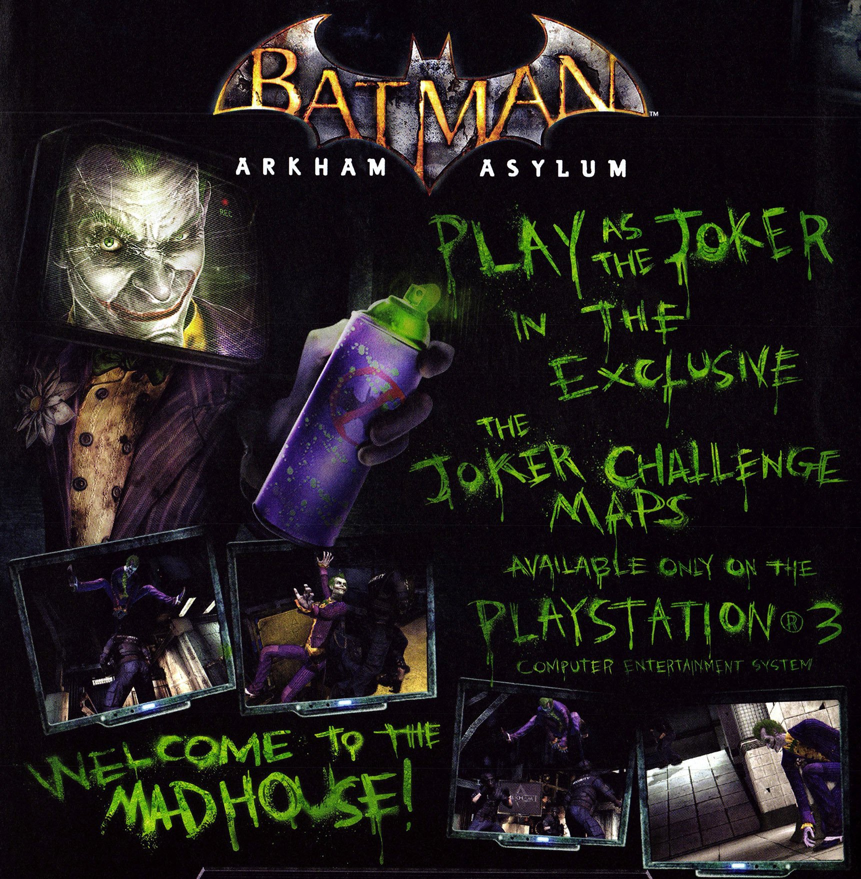
Self-proclaimed "super hardcore fan"

- Quizzed by phone to ensure Google-free results

With the all-mighty Todd Howard clocking in at a respectable three out of five, could superfan Kyle possibly hold his own? Uh, well, yes! Aside from believing incorrectly that Pugilism Illustrated is responsible for boosting the Melee Weapons skill (it actually boosts unarmed skill—easy mistake) and that Gary can be found in Vault 92, Kyle has his *Fallout 3* trivia down pat and managed to earn the same score as Todd. Well done, Kyle!

FINAL SCORE: 3 out of 5

It's a Tie!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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

- Alcohol and Tobacco Reference
- Blood
- Mild Language
- Suggestive Themes
- Violence

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(s09)

8 HELLBOUND: JONATHAN KNIGHT

Writer, producer, and director for EA's *Dante's Inferno*

Dante's Inferno has copped a fair amount of flak for, to put it politely, copying *God of War's* brutal style and its quick-time-event–fueled combat system. But, *Dante's* main man, Jonathan Knight, told us he's actually flattered by the comparison when we caught up with him this month.

PTOM: We don't mean to insinuate anything, but do you really not mind when people say your game is a lot like *God of War*?
Jonathan Knight: We never get sick of hearing it because it's the greatest compliment we can be paid. We hope to be worthy of that. Those guys are at the top of their game and there's no question *God of War III* is going to be spectacular. I'll be first in line to get it. I hope those comparisons are being made because our combat system is just as responsive—the control over the character is very immediate, it's very fast-paced, you can branch out of moves very easily, you feel very powerful, and overall it's just a fun game to play.

We have other influences too, but I think what's different about our game is it's based on an incredibly influential work of literature. Out of that flow really fresh gameplay ideas such as the Holy Cross weapon, the ability to absolve or punish the damned, and riding the giant demons. Hopefully, there's plenty of room for lots of other great games in the genre—we just want to be one of them.

One of *Dante's Inferno's* more original aspects is the setting. The nine circles of Hell is ideal videogame fodder. Still, a poem-based game must have raised eyebrows when you pitched it?
I'm in a really great studio full of plenty of awesome gamers, and they really just got it straight away. I had this idea of a game set in Hell, and I started doing some research, and one of the first things I read was *Dante's Inferno.* I hadn't read it before, but I was still very familiar with it, as a lot of people are. I just thought: "We've gotta do this as a videogame; it's perfect material." So I went in and said I was going to do a very dark, mature action adventure game set in Hell, and they said: "Go for it!"

Did you have to take a lot of creative license when fleshing out the story and characters?
The big things I took from the poem were the setting, the cast of characters, and the whole geography of Hell, and they're things we've faithfully reproduced. By and large, Dante's vivid descriptions and vision of what it would be like—the cliffs, the hills, the mountains, the trees, the rivers, the order in which the circle unfolds, the sprawling cities and the tower—are things we've taken to heart.

What the poem doesn't really offer is a great story. There's not a lot that actually happens because a lot of the poem is descriptive. We've taken the fundamentals—which is Dante's story and his quest to find Beatrice, who plays a big part in the game—and we've built on that to give Dante a more sophisticated history and make him an action hero. Dante is a little bit of a traditional hero and an anti-hero. What I hope is that the way you think about him at the game's beginning is quite different from how you think of him at the end.

I think what's fresh about our character upgrade system is how open-ended it is. The souls you collect are the economy, and there are actually a lot of different ways to get souls. Once you have them, it's really up to you how you spend them, and we're gonna open up that upgrade tree pretty wide from the beginning. You'll be able to upgrade the Scythe, the Cross, and the magic powers.

If *Dante's Inferno* does well, are sequels inevitable—especially since *Inferno* is only the first part of *The Divine Comedy*? It's a classic trilogy that would easily lend itself to a videogame adaptation if Dante takes hold.
I barely have time to think about what's going on at home! But you have to earn the right to do a sequel.

Divine Influences: The sources that shaped *Dante's Inferno*

The Divine Comedy
Written by Italian poet Dante Alighieri in the early 1300s, this massive poem is the story of Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. *Inferno* is the opening segment, and depicts Dante's passage through the nine circles of Hell: limbo, lust, gluttony, greed, anger, heresy, violence, fraud, and treachery.

God of War
The series has made the use of quick-time events and hugely cinematic set pieces fashionable, as well as making it okay for games to take inspiration from literature and mythology. *God of War III* looks like it'll perfect the mix.

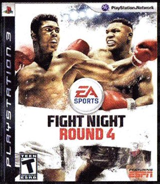
Devil May Cry
DMC has always been the most stylish button-masher around, making a virtue of its guns-and-swords gameplay and flamboyant hero, Dante. His name isn't a coincidence—it's a nod to *The Divine Comedy's* author.

You don't know Hell like Dante knows Hell: Try facing off against *God of War's* Kratos in the games market.

> "I was going to do a very dark, mature action adventure game set in Hell, and they said: 'Go for it!'"

9 FACE TO FACE

Are videogames becoming too short to be truly satisfying? Roger says, "Yes!" Rob says, "No!" *You* decide the WINNAR!



Aaaah, *Fight Night Round 4.* One of Rob's favorite games and jampacked with hours of fun and almost limitless replay value. Oh, the irony...

ROGER: Frankly, I'm outraged! There was a time when quality was the only thing that needed considering when judging a game. But lately, it seems like more and more games are shortchanging us on sheer gameplay quantity. Remember when you could expect at least 15 to 25 hours of gameplay on practically every game you bought? The recent trend is that you're lucky if you get 10 to 15 hours of gameplay, and some games have the audacity to offer a mere five to 10 hours of play! This is next-gen gaming? I guess if you're only playing for a single-digit amount of hours, publishers figure you'll be ponying up your next 60 bucks that much sooner.

ROB: Roger, you're a dinosaur. Or you've too much time on your hands. Or you're a college student sucking your parents' hard-earned funds dry while you accumulate Trophies. Who has time for 20- to 30-plus hour games? Are you honestly going to see the end credits, or are you going to give up six to 10 hours after starting? The old "value for money" chestnut doesn't hold up, either. One movie equals $10 equals two hours. One game equals $60 equals 10 hours. In this broad example it's the difference of precisely $1 an hour. Give me a truly memorable six-hour gaming experience, and I'll be happy to fork over my $60.

ROGER: You want short and sweet? There's a place for you, Rob. It's called PSN. When a game costs five to 15 bucks on average, I begrudgingly concede that 10 hours of gameplay is reasonable and any multiplayer content is a welcome value-added bonus. But I'd take that 60 bucks you're blowing on that barebones Blu-ray SKU of a game and spend it on five to 10 PSN games. *Ratchet & Clank: Quest for Booty* gives me a bite-sized bit of gaming goodness at a reasonable price, and I'd still have games like *Fat Princess, PixelJunk Monsters,* and the multiplayer mayhem of *Battlefield 1943* to boot. While I'm reveling in hours upon hours of great PSN games like *PAIN,* you'll merely be feeling the pain of your hard-earned money burning up in your hands in the proverbial blink of a gaming eye.

ROB: Tragically, Rog, if your attitude were to prevail, the games industry would collapse. How many sales of other games would be lost if everyone spent 20-plus hours with one game? Between rentals and returns, gamers can consume more content and get more enthused about that next hit. Even one *Madden* season can last an entire year. Is time spent futzing with a *LittleBigPlanet* level that nobody will ever play really worth the effort and investment that could have been applied to the cool curved bullet mechanic in the short but satisfying *Wanted?* Give me great times in manageable doses and maybe I'll see the end and be ready for the sequel. Under the Rog Regime, we'd all have to make do with five games released a year and hope there was one we could commit to full-time.

Tale of the tape

- **Videogame: $59.99 / 10 hours = $6.00/hour**
- **Videogame: $59.99 / 8 hours = $7.50/hour**
- **Videogame: $59.99 / 6 hours = $10.00/hour**
- Movie: $10.00 / 2 hours = $5.00/hour
- Green Day Concert: $46.50 / 2 hours = $23.25/hour
- Miley Cyrus Concert: $79.50 / 2 hours = $39.75/hour
- NFL game: $72.00 / 3 hours = $24.00/hour
- NBA game: $49.00 / 2.5 hours = $19.60/hour
- MLB game: $27.00 / 3 hours = $9.00/hour
- PTOM issue: $5.99 / ?? hours = Priceless

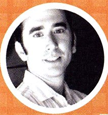
So... Who's right? Who's wrong?

Tell us who won the showdown and send your thoughts on whether games are too short to

PTOM_Letters @futureus.com.

10 THE BURNING QUESTION

This month, we asked developers: What's your biggest game design pet peeve?



Matt Hooper

ID SOFTWARE, LEAD DESIGNER

"An inventory cap… encumbrance. I mean, it's a videogame. Who cares how many weapons or items you can carry?"

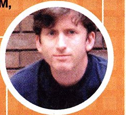
Our take: You hear that down there, Todd? Matt Hooper wants nothing to do with *Fallout 3's* item management shenanigans.

Evan Wells

NAUGHTY DOG, CO-PRESIDENT

"I do have one, but it's mostly a developer issue, and that's not paying enough attention to the experience of maintaining immersion in a game. It's a pet peeve when developers break that, in loading files or playing a cinematic and then breaking into gameplay. Unpolished pieces like that remind me that I'm playing a videogame. Our animation and audio people hate it here because I point out a one-frame pop, and insist they smooth all that out. But even if it's just one frame among hundreds, if it breaks the immersion, it spoils the experience."

Our take: Could you do something about the game-interrupting issues we have at PTOM, Evan? Something called "work"…

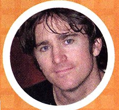


Todd Howard

BETHESDA, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

"I have so many…but surprise death, that's easy. Y'know, when you die and you've no idea why."

Our take: So you're not a fan of *Dragon's Lair,* then?



Brian Bright

NEVERSOFT, PROJECT DIRECTOR ON GUITAR HERO 5

"My biggest pet peeve is a crappy camera and bad player control. If I'm playing a third-person game and the camera doesn't react properly behind me… It's like that guy and the box: I should be able to walk around this box and it should feel good, and if that doesn't feel good then I don't want to play the rest of the game. That's the first thing you've got to nail as a developer."

Our take: Easy for you to say; rhythm games don't even have cameras! Well, not ones you can control anyway.

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from our work 'cause if we were only picky and opinionated about games, we'd be limiting ourselves

Jean Baudin – Solace | Music | $10

Aaaah, EICs, you gotta love 'em—they're so…cultured. Our new fearless leader Eric spends his downtime contemplating the musical stylings of instrumentalist Jean Baudin, who uses massive nine-, 11-, or 12-string bass guitars to craft pulsing, fluid soundscapes that you won't believe are created by just one player in one take (no overdubbing). Plus, Jean is a gamer—his 9-string bass has Pac-Man on it, and his 11-string is inlaid with a *Joust* knight. Check him out at www.jeanbaudin.com, then type his name into YouTube to hear him play videogame themes.

Weezer – The 8-bit Album | Music | Free!

(Speaking of music and games…) Though he was just a lad at the time, the early '90s meant two things to Scott: videogames and Weezer. Now, "videogame music netlabel" Pterodactyl Squad has compiled a tribute album that actually combines the two for the ultimate explosion of '90s nostalgia. Basically, 8-bit artists like Anamanaguchi and Bit Shifter recreate 14 classic Weezer songs like "Buddy Holly" and "Island in the Sun" using modded game consoles to produce digital tones. It's a bit gimmicky, sure, but it's also super fun to listen to. Plus, it's free! Check it out at tinyurl.com/8bitweezer.

Richard Cheese & Lounge Against the Machine | Music | 6 CDs for just $41!

Not wanting to miss out on the jam session kicking off this month's Et Cetera column, Carlos the Intern recommends the…er, extraordinary Richard Cheese. Don't know who he is? Well, he plays the definitive lounge versions of hit rock and rap songs. Watch 2004's *Dawn of the Dead* and notice how much better things got when the lounge version of "Down With the Sickness" was playing, or you could just head to www.richardcheese.com.

Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection's Trophies | Trophies | $29.99

While most of the staff is enamored with music this month, Teresa's siren song is Trophies. And thanks to *Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection,* Teresa's quest to become PTOM's Ultimate Trophy Whore just got a lot easier. Talk about your truckload of cheap Trophies… Earn a Silver for simply looking at all the game box art boxes. Earn a Gold for collecting 100 rings with Tails on the first stage of *Sonic 3.* But now the rest of us *know,* Teresa… Hey! Where'd the freakin' office copy of *Sonic Collection* go?!

Sushi rice | Food | Under 5 bucks (probably)

Hmm…halfway through Et Cetera—time for lunch! Cook three cups of white rice. Mix together four tablespoons of rice vinegar, four tablespoons of sugar, two teaspoons of salt, and slowly blend the mixture into the cooked rice while it's still warm. *Voilà,* you've just created sushi rice, Teresa's favorite low-prep recipe. Add sliced cucumbers and wrap in dried seaweed for quick, easy sushi. Dab in soy sauce before each bite. Yum!

Making His Band | TV show | "Free" with cable or satellite access

Roger's not really a fan of Diddy or reality shows, but he has developed a fascination with MTV's *Making His Band.* He can't get enough of the competition between superbly talented musicians and scrutinizing the minute differences in talent and stage presence that can make all the difference as Diddy seeks performers for his tour band. Roger's early favorites? The robust and…unique vocalist Jalia and groovin' bassist Jamareo.

Blankets | Graphic Novel | $29.95

Roger just wanted a warm, fuzzy blanket for his after-lunch carb coma, but Scott handed him a copy of *Blankets* instead. Craig Thompson's deeply personal recounting of his first love captures the daunting isolation of adolescence and crushing confusion of teenage heartache with such unflinching honesty that even the stone-hearted Scott couldn't help but shed a few tears. The incredibly beautiful, thoughtful narrative demonstrates a temperance and maturity that most authors don't achieve in a lifetime. (We thinks *someone* needs a hug…)

San Francisco Giants | Sports | Free on radio and TV

It's been a few dark years for Roger's beloved San Francisco Giants, but the long trudge back to respectability that's been borne mostly by the shoulders of Lincecum and Cain was given a major boost by the trade for all-star second baseman Freddy Sánchez. Now, a run for the Wild Card spot and maybe a power hitter signing in the off-season… Why, he's so happy, he could just hug someone! "Scott? Scott! C'mere, buddy!"

Eco-flex PS3 skins | Gear | $20

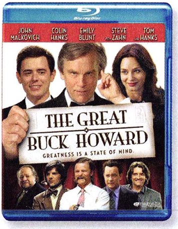
Choosing to ignore why Scott's locked himself in the closet, Eric quietly considers his first few days with PTOM and determines his PS3 needs beautifying. Most console skins look like old PC screensavers or some marketing suit's idea of "urban and hip," so he's thrilled to find www.eco-flex.com, whose high quality vinyl skins range from a tasteful brushed metal texture to freaky alien critters. They're designed by an actual artist, with more to come (Wanna submit designs? Hit the website.) The quality is spot-on and they're both simple to apply and completely removable and reusable if you change your style.

Fishing Hat | Fashion | $7.25

Not content to limit himself to his usual cultural touchstones, obscure music and comedy, Carlos the Intern has thrown his, er, hat into the fashion ring. A fishing hat, that is. According to Carlos: "Everybody wears normal baseball caps, but I want all rim with my hat!" Now, game mag editors aren't exactly known for frequenting the cutting-edge of style, but we couldn't help noticing there was something oddly familiar about Carlos' new choice of coiffure…

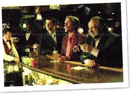
Blu-ray Central

This month: Comedies aplenty, B-movies, and TV picks and pokes



The Great Buck Howard

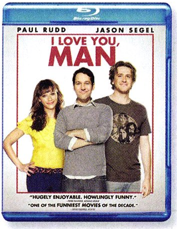
PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG-13



| MOVIE | Take the best of Woody Allen's comedies about show biz and you'll have a good idea what sort of cinematic joy awaits in *The Great Buck Howard.* It's an offbeat gem with sterling performances from John Malkovich and Colin Hanks (who is shaping up to be every bit the actor his father is). A fine foil for anyone tired of raunchy, sex-addled comedies, the movie is, in a word, great.

| EXTRAS | The commentary between the director and Hanks is a light, listenable affair, but a bit too gap heavy. The rest of the extras are the usuals—deleted and extended scenes and making-of videos, plus a bit on the inspiration for Buck Howard—the Amazing Kreskin.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★


Paul Rudd
Jason Segel
I Love You, Man
"Hugely enjoyable. Howlingly funny."
"One of the funniest movies of the decade."

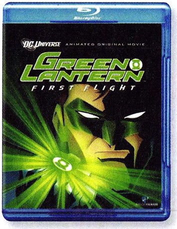
I Love You, Man

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Paul Rudd's second major comedy in the last year is another winner. Both hilarious and occasionally uncomfortably close to home for those girlfriend guys out there, *I Love You, Man* chronicles one man's search for a best friend and is the pick of the bromance lot. Starring Jason Segal, who is apparently Seth Rogan's alternate, as the friend in question, the movie treads familiar ground in an affectionate and consistently funny way. It does linger on a bit too long in spots, but that's a minor quibble.

| EXTRAS | Great, funny commentary highlights the otherwise standard selection of deleted and extended scenes and making-of bits.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



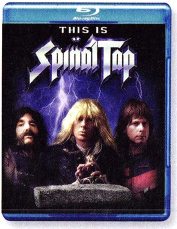
Green Lantern: First Flight

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Another winner from WB's parade of new DC animated flicks, *Green Lantern* is distinctive in how sci-fi it is. Taking place mostly in outer space, it's a great look at the long-running character with plenty of PG-13 action, excellent production values, and a solid story. Definitely doing the character justice, this is an easily recommendable pick for any superhero or sci-fi fan.

| EXTRAS | *First Flight* is jam packed with Green Lantern extras, right down to bonus Duck Dodger parodies and Justice League cartoons. There are hours of content here, making it a great all around value.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★



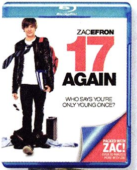
This is Spinal Tap

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Still the best mockumentary ever filmed, *This is Spinal Tap* looks decent and sounds great on Blu-ray and hasn't lost a step since its first release in 1983. Wry, funny, and full of some of the best big-hair-band song lyrics ever, the movie is a classic for a reason. While the picture quality isn't spectacular, it's certainly the best the movie has ever looked.

| EXTRAS | Music videos, retrospectives, performances, and even ads provide plenty of extra Tap love, but the audio commentary by the actual band is the highlight. Hilarious and often nonsensical insight from the band members years later is sure to delight hardcore fans, though the omission of the creator commentary from the Criterion edition DVD is a bit disappointing.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★



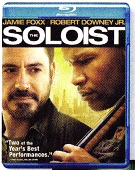
17 Again

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | If you're not a teenage girl, it's hard to take the prospect of *17 Again* seriously. It's obviously a vehicle for current teen heartthrob Zac Efron, yet for non-squeaky-girlie types, this take on *Big, Freaky Friday,* and other age transformation movies is actually very solid. The movie drags uncomfortably and is improbable in spots, but it also doesn't make parents look quite as useless as most teen-aimed dreck does. In fact, for the most part, it's actually very funny and Efron, despite how much we want to hate him, is clearly shaping up to be a solid actor.

| EXTRAS | Unless you are one of the aforementioned girlie types, the extras here are completely throwaway, we-love-Zac stuff. Blech.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★



The Soloist

PRICE: $29.98 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | If *The Soloist* wasn't based on a true story it would be an unconscionably sappy melodrama. The added element of truth behind this story of a LA Times reporter who forms an unlikely relationship with a mentally ill, homeless musical genius gives it legs, and the exceptional performances from Robert Downey Jr. and Jamie Fox make it worth seeing.

| EXTRAS | The director's commentary is solid, and the making-of videos are surprisingly well done. The interview between the actual men the film is based upon, along with others who knew them, adds a great level of depth to the movie as well.

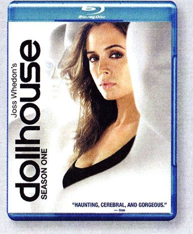
MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

Blu TV

Blu-ray Disc
burn notice
season two

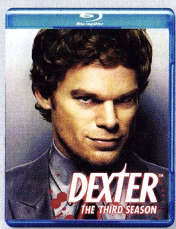
Burn Notice: Season Two

+ Hollywood spy thrillers may have gotten boring and political, but between the hilarious *Chuck* and the slick *Burn Notice,* TV spies are better than ever. Season two packs in the action and humor, but the grainy picture quality is certainly disappointing.


Blu-ray Disc
Joss Whedon's
dollhouse
SEASON ONE
"HAUNTING, CEREBRAL, AND GORGEOUS."
— Time

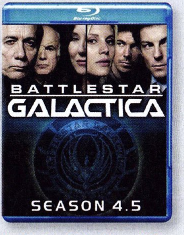
Dollhouse: Season One

- Joss Whedon's much ado about nothing, a lame overall concept and incredibly mediocre scripting damn a show that's all looks and no luster.


Blu-ray Disc
DEXTER
THE THIRD SEASON

Dexter: The Third Season

+ Funny, creepy, and wonderfully written, *Dexter* may push credulity, but it's still such a fun and addictive ride that you'll hardly care.


Blu-ray Disc
BATTLESTAR
GALACTICA
SEASON 4.5

Battlestar Galactica – 4.5

+ Murphy's Law in space, this oppressively intense show has earned its stripes with some of the most gorgeous sci-fi cinematography ever seen on the small screen. If you can take the downtrodden nature of the plotting, it's a brilliant addition to the collection and available as either the complete series or merely the final season (4.5).

Attack of the B-movies! They Came from the Blu!

Blu-ray Disc
25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
THE LAST STARFIGHTER

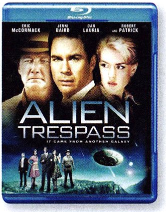
The Last Starfighter

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | If you were a sci-fi nerd in the '80s, the odds are good that *The Last Starfighter* has a special place in your heart. The second film to use CG in a major way (after *TRON),* it certainly looks dated, but the movie—in which a videogamer gets drafted as a pilot in an interstellar war—remains a guilty pleasure. Although not likely to attract any new fans, and with the usual less-than-great picture quality that hounds '80s movies on BD, the movie remains a gamer's adolescent dream come true.

| EXTRAS | Fans will dig the remarkably conversational and informative commentary between the director and production designer, along with several retrospectives, and an image gallery.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★


Blu-ray Disc
ERIC McCORMACK
JENNI BAIRD
DAN LAURIA
AND ROBERT PATRICK
ALIEN TRESPASS
IT CAME FROM ANOTHER GALAXY

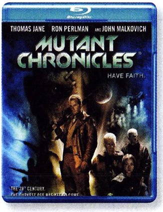
Alien Trespass

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | *Alien Trespass* relies entirely on the gimmick of being a direct homage to terrible sci-fi movies of the '50s and '60s. As such, if you're not into the joke, the movie will seem as cheesy and alien as its monster. For those who do enjoy the genre, this is fun stuff, but certainly not likely to earn a status any more classic than that of most of the movies it copies. Still, it's worth a look for sci-fi lovers.

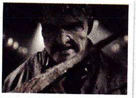
| EXTRAS | Disappointingly light on extras, there's just a few trailers, a couple featurettes and an interview.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★


Blu-ray Disc
THOMAS JANE RON PERLMAN AND JOHN MALKOVICH
MUTANT CHRONICLES
HAVE FAITH.
THE 28th CENTURY.

Mutant Chronicles

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R



| MOVIE | Steampunk meets World War II meets zombie invasion meets exceptionally violent awesomeness! *Mutant Chronicles* is a green-screen movie with a terrific cast and an eye for outrageous sci-fi violence, bad-ass characters, religious zealots, and all the hardcore sci-fi elements that lovers of the genre expect. The movie certainly won't appeal to everyone, but as far as visceral and gratuitous B-movies go, this is the best since *Zombie Strippers.*

| EXTRAS | Plenty of extras round out the fantastic presentation. Excellent commentary from the director and actor Ron Perlman, tons of making-of bits, deleted scenes, interviews, and more cover all aspects of the movie.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★

Jason D'Aprile will always have a soft spot for a good (or bad) B-movie. Questions, comments, rants, raves? E-mail him! **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY

TEEN™ T Fantasy Violence Mild Language Partial Nudity ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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PREORDER THE **BUNDLE** at GameStop power to the players

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CHOOSE YOUR SIDE

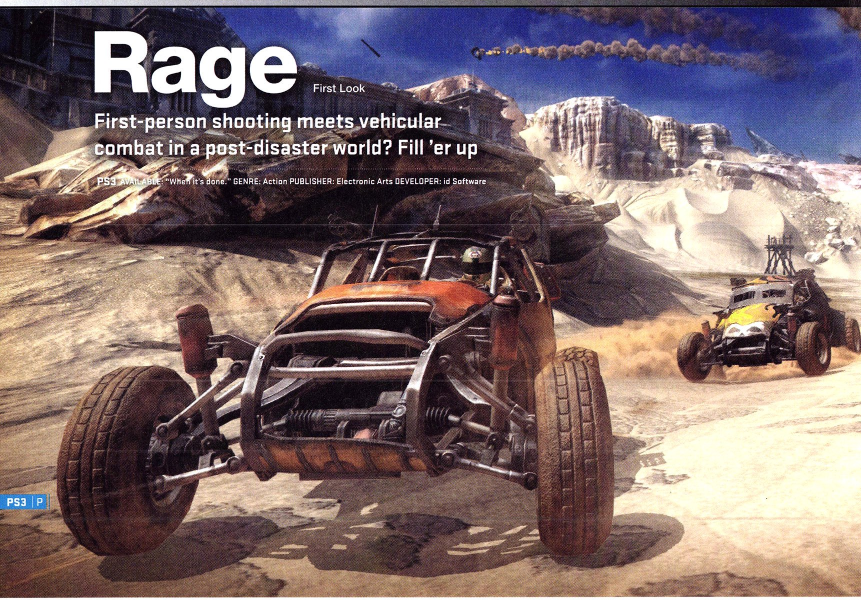
AUGUST 25, 2009

PlayStation®Portable

SQUARE ENIX

Previews

First Look | Hands-On | In-Depth

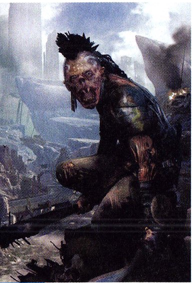


Rage

First Look

First-person shooting meets vehicular combat in a post-disaster world? Fill 'er up

PS3 AVAILABLE: "When it's done." GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: id Software

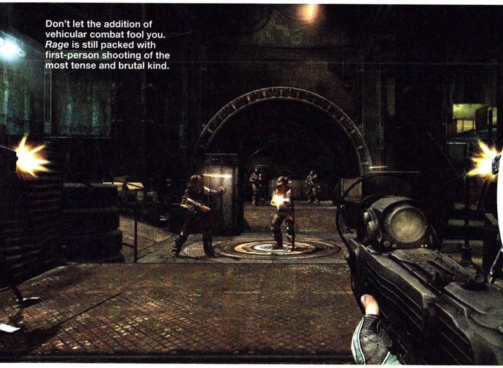


Driving through this wasteland, you want to stop and smell the roses. We mean that figuratively, of course, because in this desolate post-asteroid-impact setting, we didn't actually see any roses. Nor any tulips, lilacs, or any other picturesque plant life. But the *detail* in the environments, the orange-pink glow of the sunlit rock formations, buggy tires kicking up plumes of dust as they screech over rough trails, and buildings crafted from scavenged material still combine to make for some memorable sightseeing.

Suddenly, you're ambushed by marauders and thrown into life-or-death vehicular combat, the tires of your upgradeable buggy (the first of many different rides you'll scrounge, earn, or buy) spinning, and enemy bullets whizzing in your direction. It takes your focus from the incredible detail of the world and puts it firmly on staying alive. Finally, one last shot sends your attackers bursting into a white-hot bloom of flame and you resume your journey to the mutant stronghold. Once there, you'll hop out and do what you've been hired to do: purge the structure, slaughtering every living thing you see, creating a bloodbath of first-person shootery.

In case you haven't noticed yet, the world as you knew it is *over.* As an asteroid zeroed in on planet Earth, the world's governments began the Eden Project, building "Arks" that would be buried deep in the ground and resurface at various times, re-seeding the Earth with humanity. Each housed a dozen or so specially selected occupants—doctors and engineers, for example. But when you emerge 80 years later, your cryo-slumber interrupted prematurely by an earthquake, it's not quite clear even to you how you earned your seat in the time capsule.

What *is* clear is that you're not alone. Your Ark mates didn't survive the premature ejection, but quite a few resourceful souls survived the original impact and some Arks, scheduled to reemerge earlier than yours, have done so successfully. Many people have



Don't let the addition of vehicular combat fool you. *Rage* is still packed with first-person shooting of the most tense and brutal kind.

even forgotten the Ark dwellers (though a random townie comments that your uniform identifies you as one of "them") and most are unique characters, shaped by life in a hazardous environment crawling with mutants and possibly by the propaganda of The Authority, a mysterious pseudo-government. The Authority's role in shaping *Rage's* post-impact society isn't yet known, but has a shadowy, post-apocalyptic regime ever been up to anything good?

Developers playing with wonderful toys

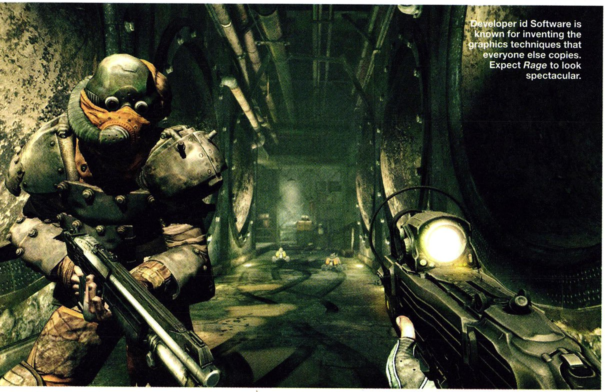
"One reason we picked the post-apocalypse setting was because it offers science-fiction–style stuff like mutant attackers, nanodrites (tiny machines that live in your blood and replenish your health), etc., but also settings that are familiar," explains the game's Creative Director, Tim Willits, "otherwise we could just do space and have planets with silly names and silly enemies."

Indeed, each situation and location, from the starting area we saw through the planned dead city and industrial areas, is expected to be glazed with unique flavor. "The technology allows us to create very unique environments, and the most amazing looking game," offers Art Director Stephan Martiniere, almost nonchalantly. Strong words, to be sure, but when your boss and tech lead is developer id software's co-founder and über-programmer John Carmack and the evidence onscreen backs you up, it's tough to call them overconfident.

Despite the stellar graphics and art design, you may find yourself captivated instead by the individuals who populate this beautifully destroyed wasteland. "Because of the richer story (than id's flagship franchises, the *Doom, Quake,* and *Wolfenstein* series) we need over-the-top characters, and because of the art and environment quality we have to make those characters cool," explains Matt Hooper, the game's lead designer.

This statement represents a bit of a departure considering id's games are typically known for perfectly balanced weaponry, intense action, and the highest-end graphics—definitely not for character development. But *Rage* already showcases distinctive characters that positively drip personality. In the first town we saw, Wellspring, we met the Sheriff, the Mayor, and the Producer of a game show called "Mutant Bash TV." All three were all incredibly distinctive, having been hand-animated to convey as much style and emotion with their bodies and rubbery faces as they do with their words.

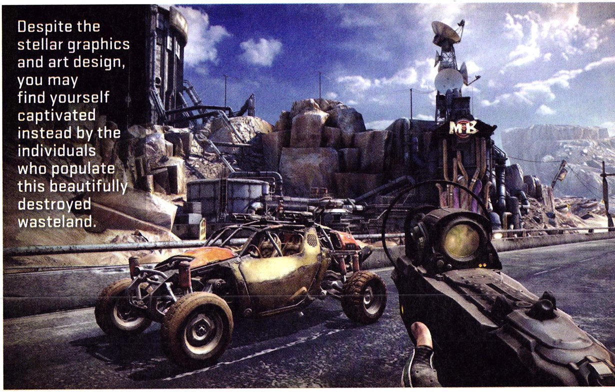
These in-game characters are your source of income and the engine that drives the gameplay. You can play a dice mini-game with



Developer id Software is known for inventing the graphics techniques that everyone else copies. Expect *Rage* to look spectacular.

id boss **John Carmack** on Rage

- We'll do a better, more vigorous job on testing than we have done in our past games.
- We have to cover it in quality.
- For years id avoided doing people [in their games] because it was hard to make them not look stupid. It was easy with zombies because they have no brains, so of course they look stupid.
- We're saving the very first level to be the last one built, so it should be some of the best stuff in the game. It's tough with testing to drop folks in and not go through the start, but it should work out for the best.
- Multiplayer is still to be decided.
- *Rage* is id's largest project ever.
- PS3 does have a bit more power [than Xbox 360].
- Depending on what we do with the megatextures, we get better performance on the PS3 because of the Blu-ray and dedicated hard drive.



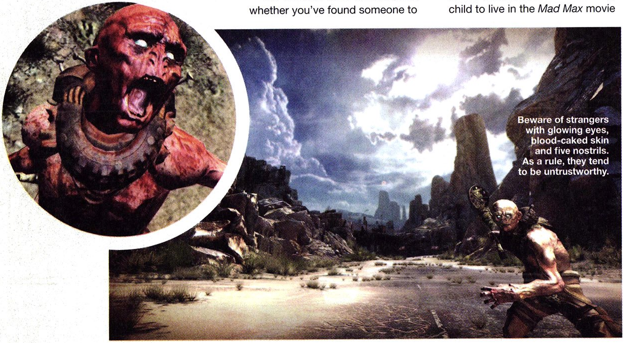
Despite the stellar graphics and art design, you may find yourself captivated instead by the individuals who populate this beautifully destroyed wasteland.

certain townies to earn cash or sell them items you've scavenged. The Producer will hire you to appear on Mutant Bash TV and shoot as many mutants as possible for fame and fortune. The Sheriff and Mayor will send you out on jobs against bandits marauding across the wasteland, and into strongholds occupied by mutants. In return you'll earn cash and scavenge for items to build new objects—like defense turrets, remote-control cars, and more.

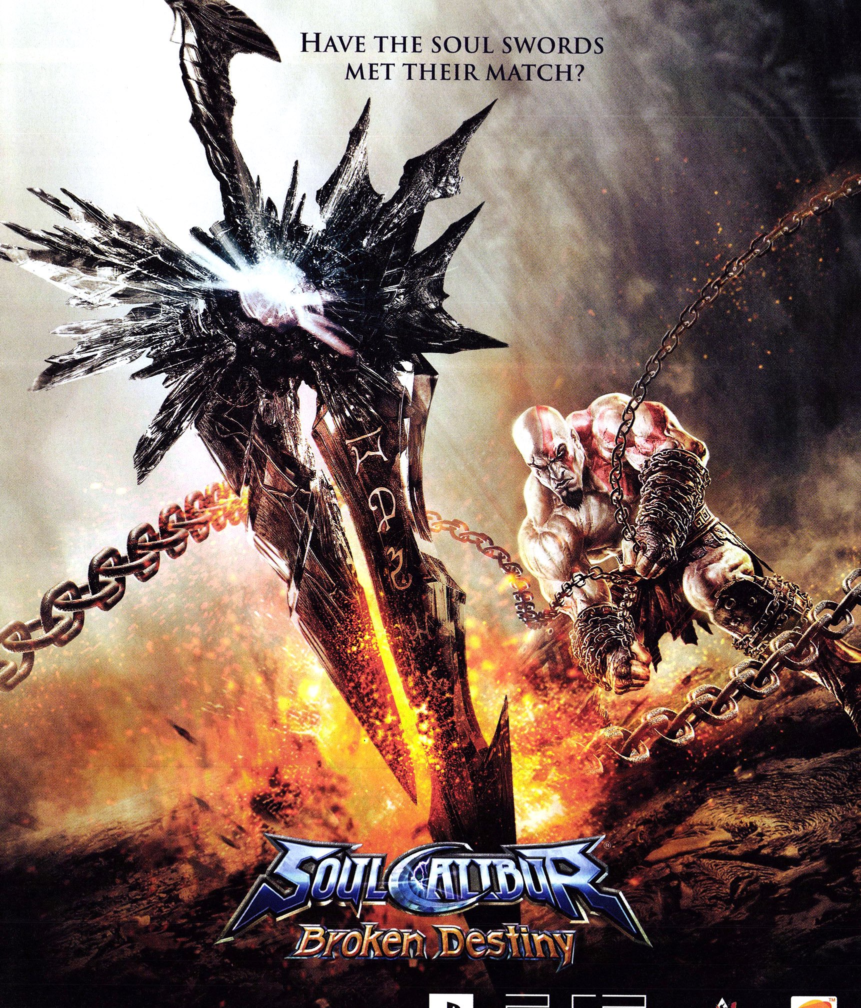
You can also build vehicles, and whether you've found someone to sponsor you in races (yet another way to earn money) or are just getting from point A to B, your wheels are integral to the overall experience. "We wanted getting to jobs to be as much fun as the jobs themselves" explains Willits. So while you might need to travel to a new location for a mission, you'll have fun (and that means white-knuckle vehicular fighting) getting there. It's as if the car combat series *Twisted Metal* and all-terrain racer *MotorStorm* had a secret affair and sent the resulting child to live in the *Mad Max* movie universe. You'll be able to keep your rides in a garage accessible in the town and upgrade them by adding new parts—shocks, engines, weapons... And just when you think you've built the perfect post-apocalyptic honey wagon, you'll discover a whole new vehicle and the process will begin anew.

On-foot combat is designed to be straight-up action focused, though a headshot with a steel-tipped crossbow bolt will still accomplish a one-hit kill. So will a direct hit with the silent, boomerang-style Wingstick (like the razor-edged 'rang in *The Road Warrior* film) though Willits is quick to point out that this is not a stealth game. In action, we saw human enemies taking cover behind objects in the environment while mutants just flooded our position. The lens effect from zooming in on an enemy showed artistic flair to support its practical purpose. Given that id practically invented the first-person shooter, we expect *Rage* to fully deliver the goods in this department. The thing that impresses us is just how ambitiously on track it seems in every other aspect as well. Though we'll have to wait until id decides when it's done to see for sure, we're feeling optimistic about how the new world will evolve under the watch of The Authority.

Rob Smith



Beware of strangers with glowing eyes, blood-caked skin and five nostrils. As a rule, they tend to be untrustworthy.


HAVE THE SOUL SWORDS
MET THEIR MATCH?
SOULCALIBUR®
Broken Destiny

TEEN

Mild Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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PlayStation®Portable

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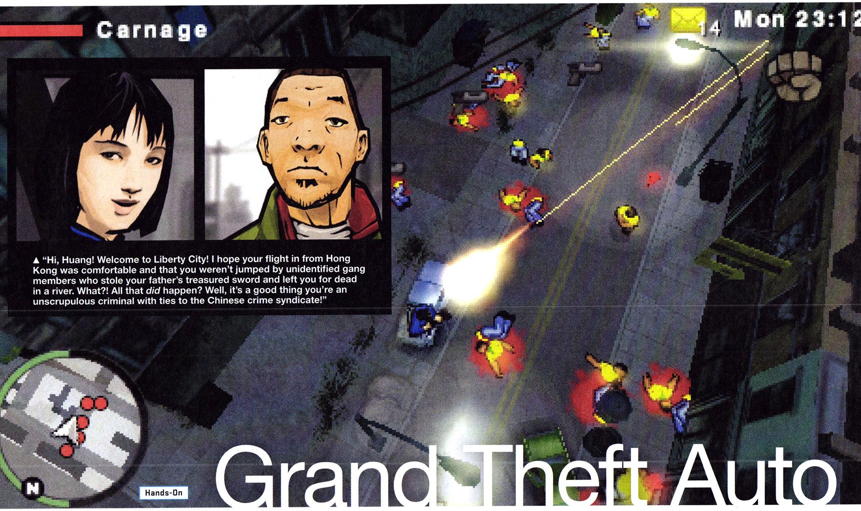
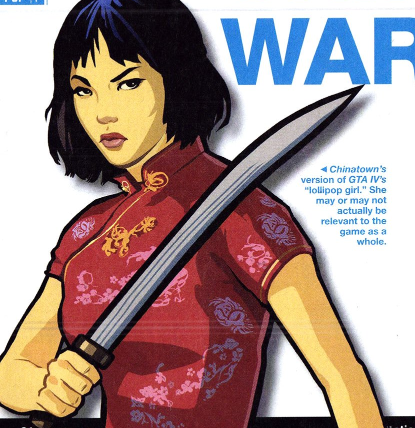


▲ "Hi, Huang! Welcome to Liberty City! I hope your flight in from Hong Kong was comfortable and that you weren't jumped by unidentified gang members who stole your father's treasured sword and left you for dead in a river. What?! All that *did* happen? Well, it's a good thing you're an unscrupulous criminal with ties to the Chinese crime syndicate!"

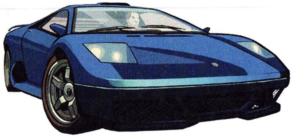
Hands-On

Grand Theft Auto CHINATOWN WARS

PSP | P



◀ *Chinatown's* version of *GTA IV's* "lollipop girl." She may or may not actually be relevant to the game as a whole.

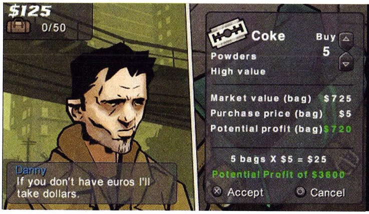


Liberty City never sleeps

PSP AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Sandbox shooter PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar Leeds/Rockstar North

Crap. Our tank is on fire. How can a tank be on fire?! Oh well, it doesn't matter. We just spent the past five minutes reducing a major metropolitan area to a smoldering pile of debris in order to keep the cops occupied while our bloodthirsty associate pulled a heist, and now we just have to make it to the nearest body of water so we can ditch this wreck and sink our six-star Wanted Level along with it. Yep, this is definitely a *Grand Theft Auto* game… though you might not know by looking at it.

Unlike the two previous *GTA*s for the PSP—*Liberty City Stories* and *Vice City Stories*, if you're somehow unaware—*Chinatown Wars* abandons the third-person camera of the modern console games. Instead, it uses an aerial view more akin to the style of the original *Grand Theft Auto* games. But while the classic games used



$125
0/50

Danny
If you don't have euros I'll take dollars.

Coke Buy 5
Powders
High value
Market value (bag) $725
Purchase price (bag) $5
Potential profit (bag) $720
5 bags X $5 = $25
Potential Profit of $3600
Accept Cancel

Drug Money

Side missions and mini-games have long played a major supporting role in the *GTA* franchise, but *Chinatown Wars* introduces the most sophisticated and potentially worthwhile sub-game to date. Yes, that's right, you're given an all-access pass to the glamorous world of drug dealing! You can use your PDA to find dealers and track trends in the market so you can buy low in one part of town and sell high in another. Supply and demand fluctuate constantly, so if you've got the patience, you can always find a way to make a profit, especially since you'll have a choice of six different controlled substances to buy or peddle. Price is also affected by the presence of a security camera: high-risk areas mean higher prices. However, you can destroy a camera to create more competition and earn yourself a discount. There are 100 cameras in the game, so completionists will need to destroy them all eventually.

direct top-down views of what were still two-dimensional cities, *Chinatown Wars* features a full 3D world and a camera that can rotate 360 degrees around the action, plus all the modern physics and tech we've come to expect such as dynamic shadows and weather, and a day/night cycle.

So the game certainly looks different (which the developers hope will create a more fast-paced and arcade-like feel), but all the trademark gameplay elements remain intact. You can still commandeer anything with four wheels (or two, for that matter), freely explore a massive open environment, arm yourself with everything from katanas to flamethrowers, and perform various favors, tasks, and errands for the city's shadiest characters…or simply for your own amusement.

Huang out to dry

The story this time centers around a young, spoiled member of the Triad gang named Huang Lee, whose gangster father recently died of very unnatural causes. With his father now resting in peace, Huang travels from Hong Kong to Liberty City to seek revenge, secure his inheritance, and deliver a symbolic sword to his family's new patriarch: his ruthless uncle Kenny, who's vying for leadership of the Chinese crime syndicate.

Naturally, things don't go as planned, and Huang is shot and stripped of his possessions by unknown assailants soon after his arrival. Now he's got to find the gunmen and recover the sword, which is going to be tough because *Chinatown*'s city includes way more than just… well, Chinatown. In fact, the city is based on *GTA IV*'s rendition of Liberty City—though it omits the Alderney borough—and offers "the largest modern environment created for any handheld system to date," according to the devs.

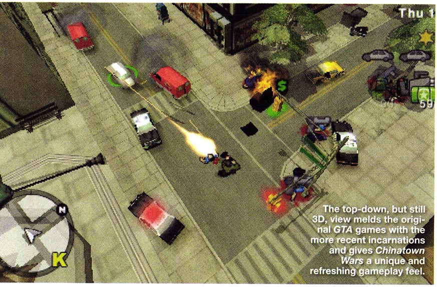
Fortunately, a handy PDA keeps you organized. It serves the same basic function as *GTA IV's* cell phone, except now you communicate via emails instead of voice—making it that much easier to ignore your cousin when he wants to go bowling. Use it to interact with non-playable characters, progress the story, receive tips, and even order weapons for delivery. But the PDA also serves as an info tracker, music player, contact database, and a GPS map system.

Basically just a normal in-game map, the ability to set waypoints and instantly receive brightly colored directions is terribly convenient. Plus, your PDA automatically saves previously discovered points of interest—Stunt Jumps, Odd Jobs, Rampages, side missions (vigilante, food delivery, et cetera), and more—and lets you store your favorite locations, which you can share wirelessly with friends. It also saves the locations of all completed missions because, for the first time, you can replay any mission to try and earn a higher "medal."

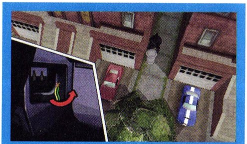
You also no longer have to outrun cops in order to lose your Wanted Level. Instead, you can simply disable them. For every star in your Wanted Level, you must bash, ram, or otherwise incapacitate an equal number of pursuing cops in order to lose one star. So if you're up to five stars, you must disable five cars in order to drop to four stars, and so on. This puts an exciting, active twist on the previously passive and defensive act of ditching the fuzz. We found it especially handy since, during our hands-on time, we had a bit of trouble discerning police from civilians and earned ourselves several unexpected Wanted stars.

Still, remarkably covert police force aside, *Chinatown Wars* is putting a fresh spin on *Grand Theft Auto's* familiar gameplay. And considering the fact the Rockstar Leeds' first two *GTA* games are among the best-selling PSP titles of all time, we're expecting great things.

Scott Butterworth



The top-down, but still 3D, view melds the original *GTA* games with the more recent incarnations and gives *Chinatown Wars* a unique and refreshing gameplay feel.



Port-able

Did you know *Chinatown Wars* was originally developed and released (this past March) for the Nintendo DS? Strange but true! And given that the DS system possesses an additional touch screen that the PSP does not, a few changes had to be made when porting the game between the platforms.

The DS's touch screen served primarily as a permanent map and PDA interface for quick, convenient navigation. Now, thanks to the PSP's wider screen, the map will simply appear in the corner of the Heads-Up Display as it does in the full-sized console games, and the PDA will essentially be accessed via a pause screen. Although the manner in which you interact with the PDA has changed, all of its functionality remains the same.

The DS version's touch screen also hosts several mini-games. For example, when you steal a parked car, you'll occasionally have to hack its security system or unscrew a panel and hotwire it. Games like these still exist in the PSP version—there's a screen of the carjacking mini-game above. You'll just use the buttons and analog stick instead of the DS' stylus and touch screen.

So really, very little has changed, and what the PSP version lacks in quirky stylus-tapping mini-games, it makes up for with additional narrative missions, improved visuals, extra music, and new side missions. Good deal, we say.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

Hands-On

It's one shot, one kill in this hyper-realistic military shooter

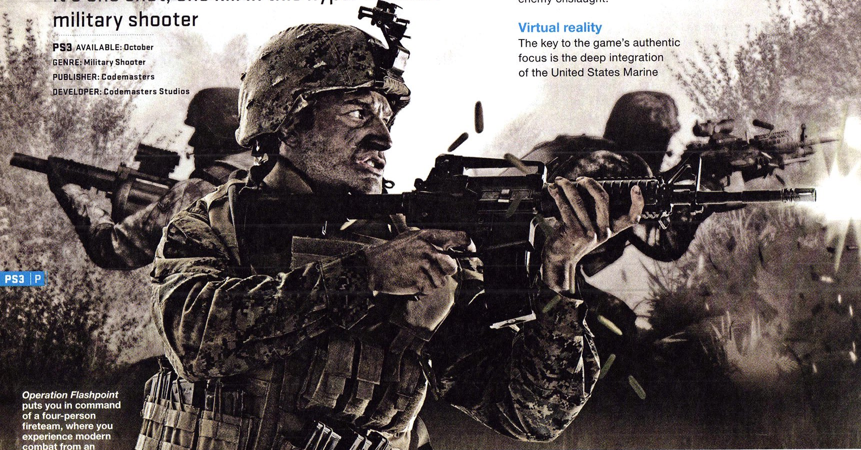
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October
GENRE: Military Shooter
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Codemasters Studios

One bullet—that's all it takes. You can do everything right—execute as you're trained, be extra careful, be razor sharp, be super smart—but if you aren't lucky, if you stick your head up just one time at the exact wrong time, you're toast. That's the reality of war. That's *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising.*

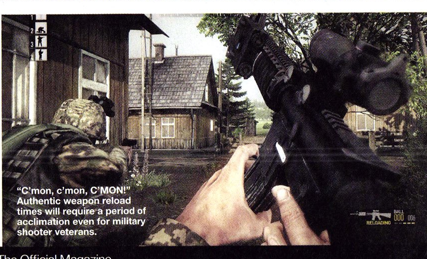
To avoid a severe case of bullet-to-the-brain-itis, you need a smart strategy. That goes for video games as well as living soldiers. When you're heading into the holiday season with the mother of all first-person shooters, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* 2, poised to launch its offensive, you'd better have a better plan than direct, open engagement on the field of retail combat. *Dragon Rising's* strategy is to play the realism card and create a more distinct and authentic military first-person shooter experience which, while not obliterating its rival, might have enough grit and uniqueness to survive the enemy onslaught.

Virtual reality

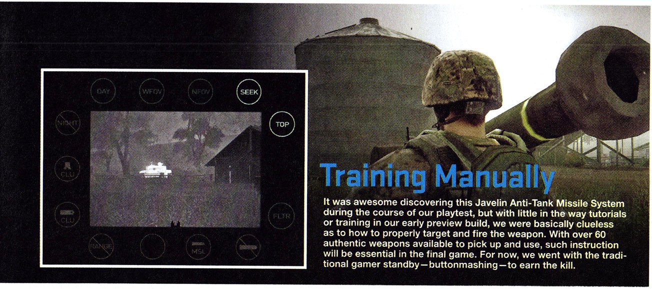
The key to the game's authentic focus is the deep integration of the United States Marine



Operation Flashpoint **puts you in command of a four-person fireteam, where you experience modern combat from an infantry-centric perspective.**



"C'mon, c'mon, C'MON!" Authentic weapon reload times will require a period of acclimation even for military shooter veterans.



Training Manually

It was awesome discovering this Javelin Anti-Tank Missile System during the course of our playtest, but with little in the way tutorials or training in our early preview build, we were basically clueless as to how to properly target and fire the weapon. With over 60 authentic weapons available to pick up and use, such instruction will be essential in the final game. For now, we went with the traditional gamer standby—buttonmashing—to earn the kill.

▲ The longer you play, the more keenly aware you become of instances when you're visibly exposed or are in a disadvantageous tactical position.

Corp's combat tactics and procedures, combined with an almost fanatical level of attention to detail for the weapons, munitions, and equipment. These are utilized by your four-man fireteam as it faces off against elements of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) on the created-for-the-game northern Pacific island of Skira. An elaborate nested menu system works in conjunction with relatively straightforward shooter controls. This pairing enables you to relay an unprecedented level of command and instruction to your squad regarding tactical elements like formation, movement, and weapons fire.

Every element of the experience is drenched in realism. Armaments and equipment mirror their real-life counterparts in form and function (Warning: weapons deployment and reloading may seem jarringly slow to gamers). Wounds require battlefield dressing to avoid blood loss and further incapacitation. You even have a variety of ways to die: fatalities range from a gradual bleed out to the aforementioned bullet with your name on it.

With this "one-shot, one death" approach, *Dragon Rising* manages to create a gameplay experience that counters *Modern Warfare's* sense of gung-ho abandon with an almost paranoid atmosphere of nervous and constant consideration.

Despite the feeling of imminent doom that accompanies you throughout combat engagements, there are moments of tranquility as you venture into and explore Skira's 136-square-miles of open-world terrain. Lucky players will commandeer a tank, jeep, or other vehicle—there are a whopping 35 from which to choose—to help root out the island's Chinese occupiers. Otherwise, you'll begin to understand the drudgery of infantry life as you set off cross-country on foot to reach your next mission objective. And it's precisely in the midst of this mind-numbing slog that you're most likely to walk directly into an enemy ambush. Hey, we said there are *moments* of tranquility, not hours.

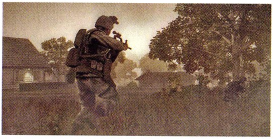
Fireteam-work

While *Dragon Rising's* single-player experience promises a number of interesting and innovative ideas, the preview build we played reveals there's a lot of polishing yet to be done. The unfinished AI prevented us from determining whether all the various realistic touches will meld with the ambitious menu-centric control system to produce a fresh, compelling experience. To be fair, our build wasn't yet final, but squad member responsiveness was severely lacking, and at times we spent as much time struggling to control our fireteam members as we spent combating enemy units.

But that's single-player. Publisher Codemasters promises a heavy focus on optimizing *Dragon Rising's* co-op multiplayer experience, and it's when the AI is swapped out for human IQ that we most enjoy the game. Whether you're playing through the 11-mission campaign with three friends or heading online for eight-man, player-vs-player action (where each person can control a four-member fireteam for a total of 32 onscreen characters), multiplayer looks to be where *Dragon Rising* will press the attack on its competition.

But offline or on, it's *Dragon Rising's* calling card of realism that'll make or break it. So is it "realistic?" Yes—certainly more so than previous military shooters, but that added dimension comes with an additional layer of complexity. Even after hours of combat, directing our squad and accessing functions via the nested menu system has yet to become second nature. And while the possibility of "realistic" death does add to the challenge quotient, we can also envision it frustratingly forcing numerous mission replays. *Dragon Rising* has the potential to become a formidable new genre force, but only if it's truly locked and loaded for the fight to come this Holiday season.

Roger Burchill

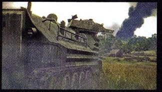


Realism is the aim, with the only gameplay difference between the three difficulty settings being onscreen indicators of mission objectives and enemy position.

Major Mobilization

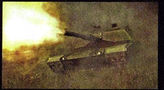
There are approximately 35 drivable vehicles in *Dragon Rising,* with the game's realism scaled back in this area in favor of pick-up-and-playability and fun. Thus, players can drive and fix most vehicles at any time. You can also choose to man the guns if the vehicle has built-in weapons, recon the battlefield from the commander position, or simply hitch a ride to the next objective.

AAV7A1 Assault Amphibian



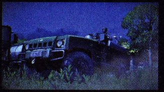
Armor is a soldier's best friend. And it can even swim.

M1-A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank



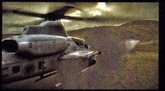
A 120mm cannon means never having to say you're sorry.

PLA Warrior Jeep

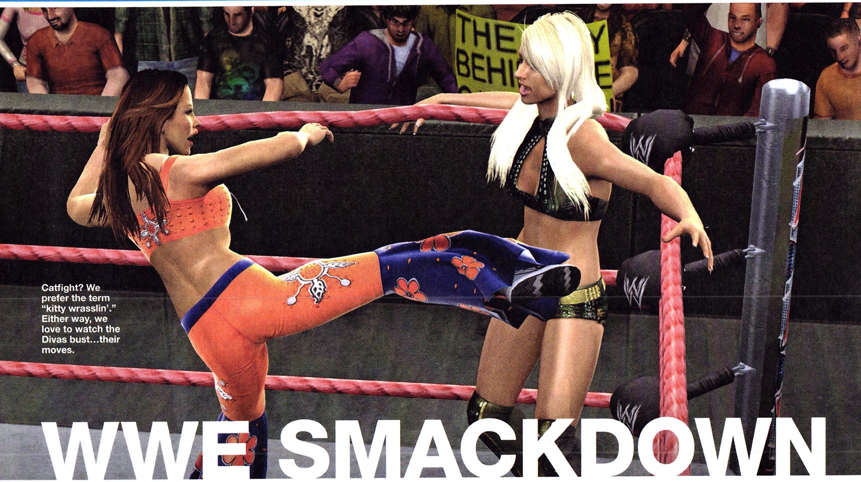


Only rappers have more heavily armed SUVs.

AH-1W Super Cobra



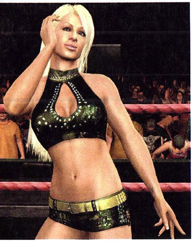
Death from above? Hopefully, but no confirmation yet.



Catfight? We prefer the term "kitty wrasslin'." Either way, we love to watch the Divas bust…their moves.

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2010

First Look



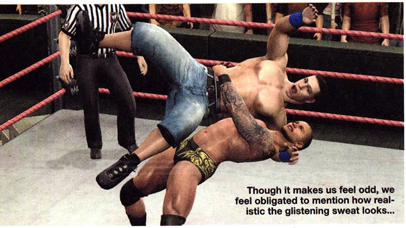
Play, create, and layeth the smackdown

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Wrestling/Fighting PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Yuke's Yokohama

What do you do when you're already the toughest badass in the arena? You're the champ. You've got the belt. You can't even remember the name of that *TNA Watchamacallit* that tried to step into the ring with you last year. Where do you go when you're already at the top of your game?

That's precisely the question facing *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010*. Despite some grumbling from franchise fanatics who bemoaned the lack of a General Manager mode, last year's *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009* looked great and played better than any of its predecessors. Faced with that reality, the obvious course for *2010* was evolution rather than revolution—with you directing the action.

Thus, this year's game has an emphasis on expanding the scope and breadth of *SVR*'s creation modes. You now have more options than ever and your created content can be uploaded and digitally shared with wrestling devotees all across the planet.



Though it makes us feel odd, we feel obligated to mention how realistic the glistening sweat looks…

Colossal customization

The Create-a-Superstar mode gets the most obvious overhaul with new, improved graphics that make your custom-created brawler look just as detailed and menacing as the real-world WWE wrestlers featured in the game. Many of the manipulatable categories are carryovers from last year, but the individual options are expanded across the board. The sheer number of available choices for appearance, attire, and accessories is simply staggering, with customization extending to elements like move sets, crowd signs, and poses. If you want a further injection of individual expression, use the all-new Paint Tool to create your own tattoos, logos, and designs for your Superstar. And for the first time, you can alter the appearance of the WWE Superstars by changing the

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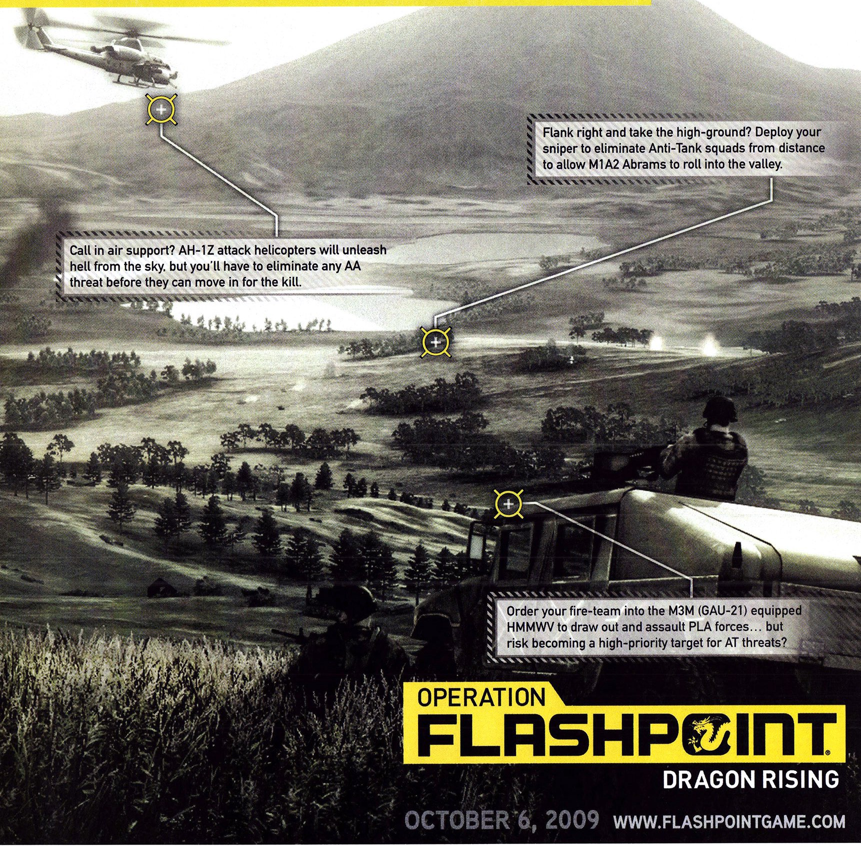

Flank right and take the high-ground? Deploy your sniper to eliminate Anti-Tank squads from distance to allow M1A2 Abrams to roll into the valley.

Call in air support? AH-1Z attack helicopters will unleash hell from the sky, but you'll have to eliminate any AA threat before they can move in for the kill.

Order your fire-team into the M3M (GAU-21) equipped HMMWV to draw out and assault PLA forces… but risk becoming a high-priority target for AT threats?

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Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

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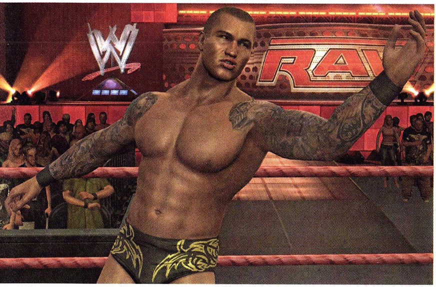


WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 does a superb job of recreating the atmosphere and spectacle of professional wrestling.

colors of their costumes using the Superstar Threads mode.

Once you've got your look down, you can access the elaborate WWE Story Designer function to create and customize a storyline for your specially crafted Superstar. Again, you'll be presented with a dizzying array of options to determine everything from the plot—you can actually type in each performer's dialogue—to locations to camera angles to your character's emotional reactions. With the melodramatic setup in place, turn your attention to creating the show card by determining the number, type, and parameters of matches.

A more directly gameplay-related customization feature is the returning and extremely popular Create-a-Finisher function. It's impressive how intuitive it is to string together various bits of pre-determined character animation to create a unique signature finishing move for your custom character. Last year, all Create-a-Finisher moves were based upon grapples from the front. This year, in addition to 30-percent more options for front grapple moves, you have the option to destroy opponents with various dives from the turnbuckle.

But the key here is that all of your created content can be uploaded and shared with the *SVR* universe. We don't know what's going to be more fun and satisfying: creating content and sharing it or downloading bits of other people's imagination for use both offline and on. Who woulda thunk that laying the smackdown could be so uplifting? Roger Burchill

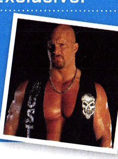
YouTube

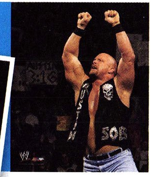
Only on PS3!

PlayStation 3 owners will be able to upload their *SVR* highlight reels directly to their YouTube accounts without ever leaving the game—a small, but welcome feature addition that makes it easier to show off your wrestling dominance. PS3 FTW and the pin!

Stone Cold Exclusive!

SVR fans that pre-order the game from GameStop or EB Games will receive the legendary Stone Cold Steve Austin as an unlockable playable Superstar. Now that's a Stone Cold Stunner of a deal.





The Raw Numbers

60+ ...number of playable WWE Superstars and Divas in *SVR 2010*. THQ is being über-secretive about the list, only confirming the following 11 characters thus far:↓

John Cena
Undertaker
Randy Orton
Edge
John Morrision
Kofi Kingston
Rey Mysterio
Chris Jericho
Triple H
Maryse
Mickie James

70+ ...Number of match types in the game including Exhibition, First Blood, Falls Count Anywhere, and Steel Cage

20,000 ...Approximate number of polygons that make up each character model—even those constructed using the Create-a-Superstar mode

76 ...Dizzying number of hairstyles available in Create-A-Superstar mode

47+ million ...number of WWE games publisher THQ has shipped worldwide since 1999

3 ...Number of commentary teams in *SVR 2010*

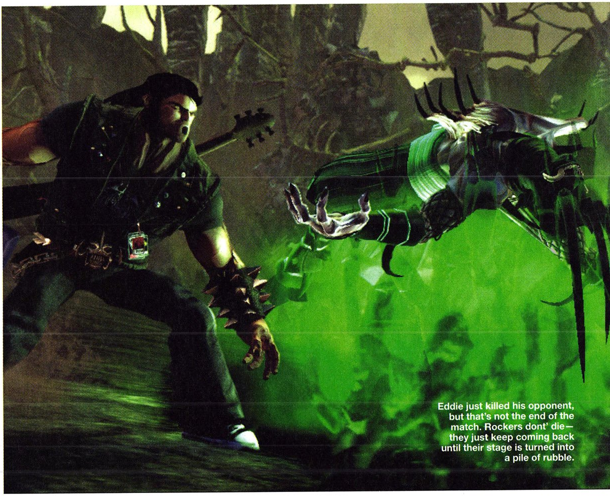
10 ...Maximum number of animation steps you can have in your Create-A-Finisher masterpiece. Each step can be adjusted for speed, trajectory, and height

Brütal Legend

Hands-On | Multiplayer

We dive headfirst into the multiplayer mosh-pit

PS3 AVAILABLE: October 13 GENRE: Action Adventure PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Double Fine



Eddie just killed his opponent, but that's not the end of the match. Rockers dont' die—they just keep coming back until their stage is turned into a pile of rubble.

Brütal Legend tells the story of Eddie Riggs, a roadie who is transported into a strange, heavy metal world. The single-player mode begins as an action game—you swing a battle axe and play a guitar that strikes your foes with lightning. But as you recruit new allies, the action expands, adding in light real-time strategy elements. You're still always on the battlefield carving enemies into bloody giblets, but you simultaneously command squadrons of troops in heated skirmishes. These real-time elements form the backbone of the game's online mode: Battle, in which the goal is to destroy the opponent's stage.

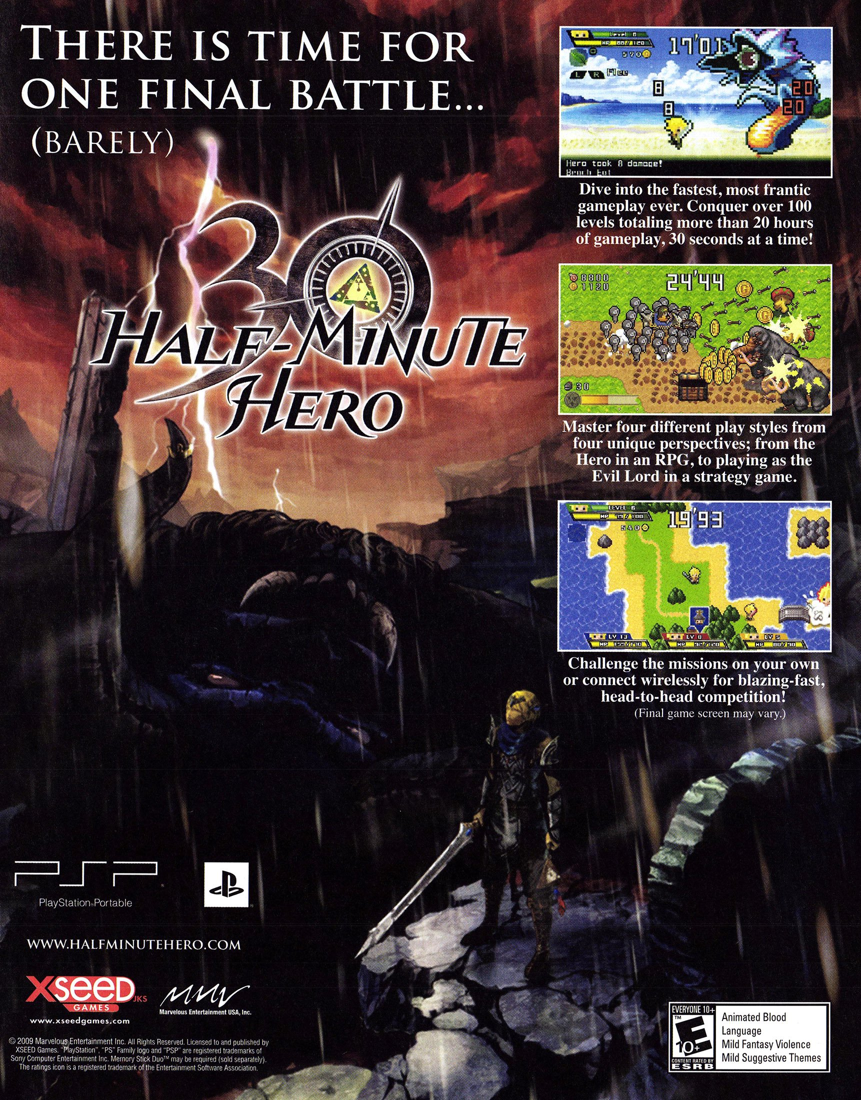
While there are seven maps overall, we played "Bleeding Coast," a beginner's map constructed on a mountainous horseshoe-shaped island. Both armies had a base—a concert stage, flanked by craters called "fan geysers"—if you build a merchandise booth on a geyser, you can spend its souls to create more units. There's also a fifth fan geyser in the middle of this map, which both armies obviously want.

Finally, both sides had a small army of vehicles, rockers, and creatures. The exact units at your disposal depend upon which faction you choose: Ironheade (Eddie's dudes), Drowning Doom (evil, demonic rockers), or the newly revealed Tainted Coil (the goth-y, emo kids). Each faction has roughly 10 different units, each more outlandishly designed than the last.

It does take awhile to absorb the controls and learn to function in the chaos of battle. But once we did, we were captivated by all of the little extra details. For instance, Eddie can play the Bring it on Home Solo, which brings a burning blimp crashing down onto the enemy (get the Led Zeppelin reference?). You can also team up with any of the basic army units, which will enable a special attack.

For instance, jump onto a Fire Baron's motorcycle, encircle the enemy, and you create a ring of fire that sets them aflame. If you pilot the Rock Crusher, a jumbo hot rod built with a razor-spiked lawnmower for a front axle, you can cast a ferocious flaming sword into your enemies. Heavy Metal craziness like that is why *Brütal Legend's* "Rocktober" release date can't get here quickly enough.

Douglass C. Perry


30
HALF-MINUTE HERO
17'01
Flee
Hero took 8 damage!
24'44
19'93
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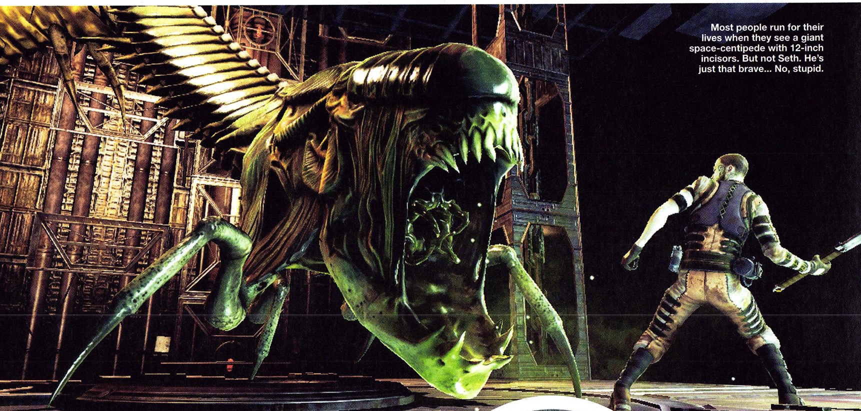
EVERYONE 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Language
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes



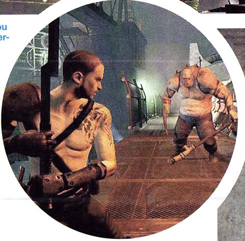
Most people run for their lives when they see a giant space-centipede with 12-inch incisors. But not Seth. He's just that brave... No, stupid.

Mars

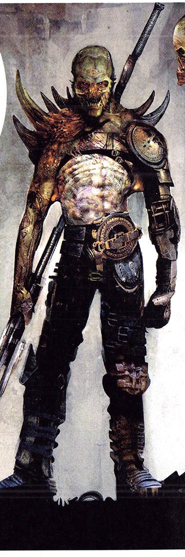
First Look

When the well runs dry, check for alien invaders

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: TBD DEVELOPER: Spiders



► Not every enemy you face belongs to a different part of the animal kingdom. Mars is home to mutants as well as monsters.



PS3 | P

One of the biggest disappointments in the recent James Bond movie *Quantum of Solace* was when it revealed that the big villain's master plan—the plan he'd sent thousands of his cronies to die for—was to control the water supply of a South American country. Sure, he could destabilize the region and start wars, but if you're like us, you still long for the days when Bond villains were threatening the White House with orbital lasers, not draining third-world water fountains. But then we got a look at *Mars* and realized how to make water wars truly interesting: put them in space and add massive piles of sizzling ray guns and slimy aliens.

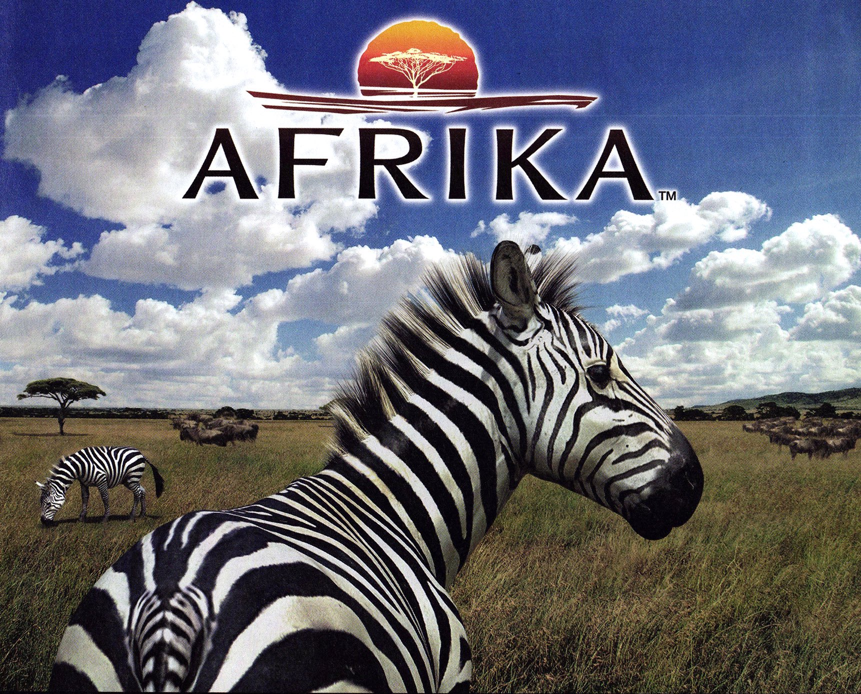
You're a soldier for a big company, fighting to control the water supply of a futuristic Martian colony rocked by some mysterious cataclysm—looking at the screens, we're thinking that's where the aliens and mutants and other space-beasts fit in. And you fit in by being the person that the humans call to smack the game's various nasties in the face until they die. As either the up-close brawler Seth or the long-distance magic user Pandora, you'll exterminate a variety of extraterrestrial creatures and deformed colonists, in what could be remarkably pretty Action RPG combat.

Both characters have an arsenal of upgradable weapons including dual blades, flails, or two-handed swords, and ancient relics you pick up along the way will enable you to unlock new special attacks, spells, and more. Skill trees will allow you to level up in the manner that best fits your play style. You can even boost your social skills in order to get better prices out of the game's many merchants. And good ol' quick-time events—which developers don't seem to realize many gamers hate—will enable you to tackle enemies with style. Expect to pull off some ridiculous combos and go up against some truly ugly bosses.

One other feature that may end up shaking up the traditional brawler formula is the inclusion of the sun as a potential weapon. (Yes, the *sun.*) By chipping away at partially destructible environments, you can let more light into a room, which will damage some enemies or flush others out of hiding. We like the idea of using your surroundings to help out in combat—we'll just have to see if this mechanic is utilized to its full potential when the game releases in 2010. At press time, a U.S. publisher hasn't yet been announced, but that's okay—thanks to the region-free PS3, we can get to *Mars* with a simple visit to Amazon UK.

Joe Newman

AFRIKA™



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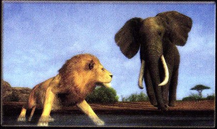

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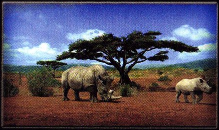

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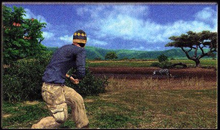

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New lack-of-hairstyle, new soup strainer, new grubby outfit...is there such a thing as a "make*under*?"

Max Payne 3

Bald, beardy, and more brutally violent than he's ever been

PS3 AVAILABLE: January 2010 GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Rockstar DEVELOPER: Rockstar Vancouver

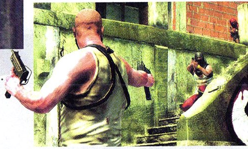
PS3 | P

His wife and baby daughter have been slaughtered by junkies. He's been accused of a murder he didn't commit, forced into a hallucinogenic drug-fueled nightmare, betrayed by those he trusted and marched out of the New York police force. He's even been played on-screen by Marky Mark in a film adaptation that has an average rating of 31-percent on review-collecting website Metacritic. Max Payne clearly has every right to be cynical. He looks it, too. Look at his new bald, bearded and grumpy face in *Max Payne 3.* He even wears a grubby white sleeveless Tee because he's just that angry.

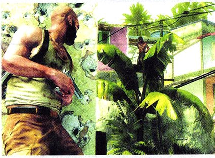
To fuel his resigned fury even further, Max has been working as a security contractor in sunny São Paulo, Brazil, mingling with unsavory types and becoming addicted to the very painkillers that boosted his health through his first two games. We can now safely confirm that the reports that *Max Payne 3* will be a gardening sim set in a quiet retirement community have been wildly exaggerated. This new and sweaty Max is still going to shoot a lot of people in slow motion while he stomps his way through shanty towns and the mansions of criminals, destroying the environment and killing every living thing between him and the level's end. He's just going to do it while looking like a failed wrestler who has picked up a job protecting a C-list celebrity.

However, Max's signature "bullet-time" move is the very definition of passé these days. Since he first dove forward with two guns blazing as time slowed to a crawl, everyone has joined in, from Persian princes to race drivers. So Max can now take cover behind objects, use enemies as human shields, and even dispatch villains using quick-timed events. Apparently, Max hasn't spent the last six years mourning his former glory—he's been playing *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand* and *Gears of War 2.*

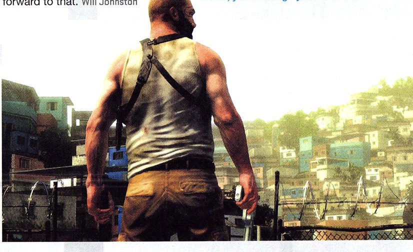
So is this new game really taking a major shift in direction? Nah. The gameplay would seem to be ticking the boxes while adding new PS3-powered gimmicks to the action like destructible environments. The cold streets of noir New York have been replaced by the shade of Brazilian palm trees, but it's the same old Max. Huge helpings of violence, slow-mo porno-kills, and pained expressions are as much a part of the show as ever. Nothing's changed. And we're looking forward to that. Will Johnston



Max's noir-ish dialogue might not fit quite as well in the sunny tropics.



Hey, if Marky Mark played you in a movie, you'd change your look too.



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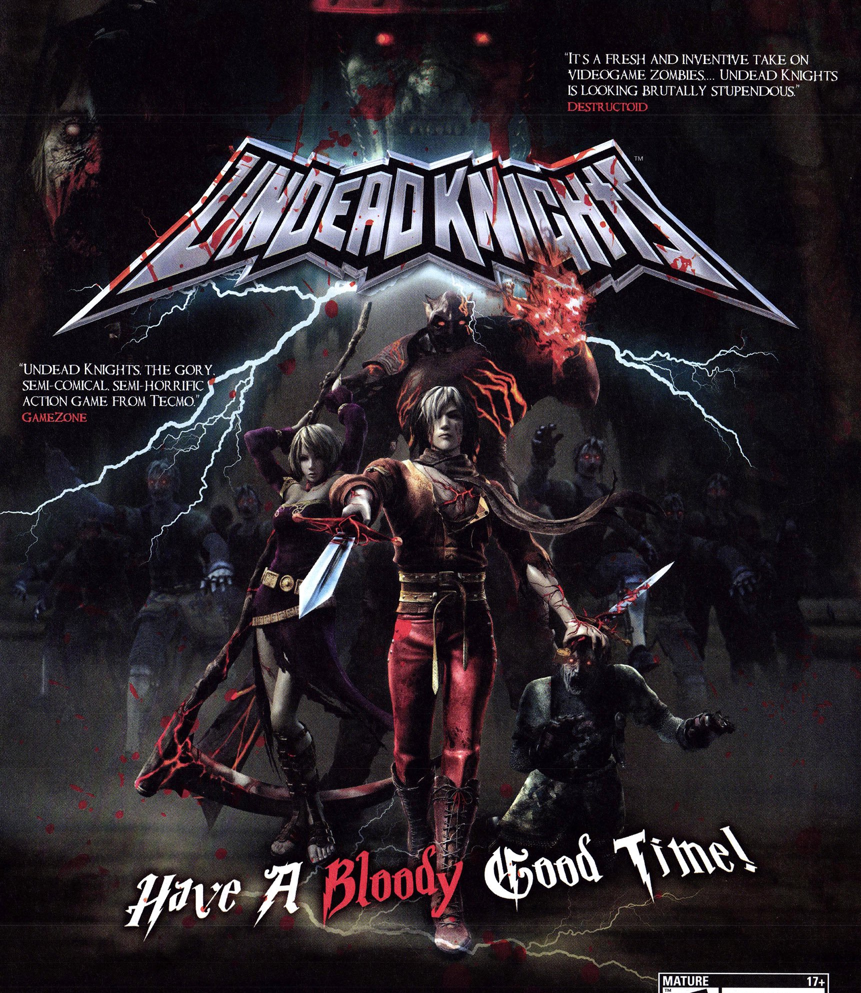
DESTRUCTOID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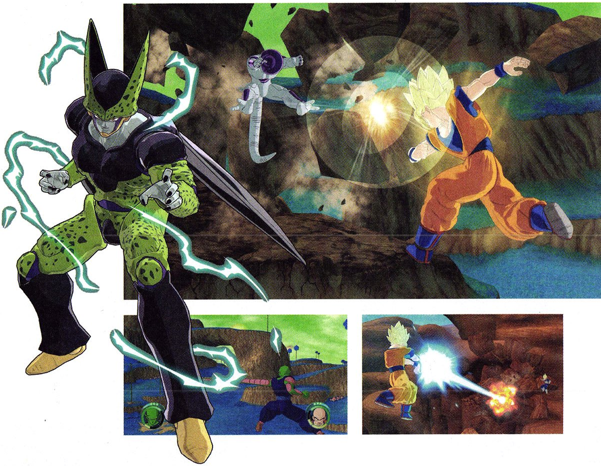
PlayStation Gallery

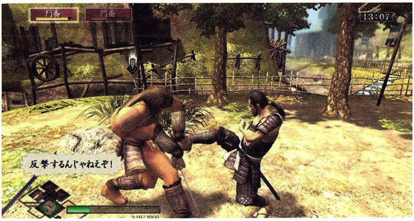
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

Dragon Ball: Raging Blast

PS3 AVAILABLE: November GENRE: Fighting
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Spike

Dragon Ball fans rejoice: Publisher Namco Bandai has teamed with developer Spike *(Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi)* to satisfy your *Dragon Ball* urge with a distinctly anime-style fighting game on PS3 this November. Its hand-drawn visual look and high-flying fighting style are far from the likes of Namco's trademark brawlers, *Tekken* and *Soulcalibur,* but there's no doubt this is a fighter through and through. *Dragon Ball: Raging Blast* pits 70 classic characters including Goku, Gohan, Piccolo, Krilin, Trunks, and Vegeta against one another in huge, destructible environments in sky-high battles using the new "Super Rising" special attack system. Rather than tell an all-new tale, *Raging Blast* combs through all of the series' most pivotal battles. However, there is a new twist: the stories also include alternate endings different from the official conclusions in the original series. Douglass





Way of the Samurai 3

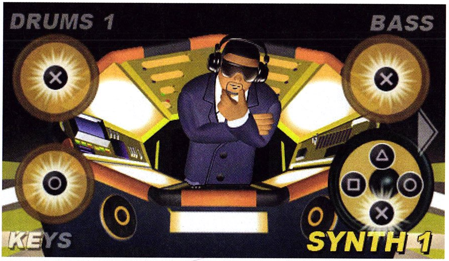
PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Action Adventure
PUBLISHER: Agetec DEVELOPER: Acquire

As a traveling samurai rambling from village to village, you're one of the last swordsmen in an age that no longer needs them. You'll encounter dozens of situations that, depending on your action—peaceful or violent—have ripple effects in the surrounding villages. Save a young woman from a gang attack, join a small militia and slay seemingly innocent men to prove your worth, or kill a combatant who begs for his life, and you'll experience the consequences or rewards later. You'll collect dozens of independently upgradeable swords that reveal new combos, attract a female samurai companion to accompany you (which is new and sounds…promising), and encounter as many as 15 different endings to the game's short but replayable storyline. Douglass

Beaterator Hands-On

PSP AVAILABLE: September 29th GENRE: Music PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar Leeds

Beaterator is not a game. There are no characters, no weapons, and no real objectives. Instead, it offers beats, loops, and an opportunity to create legitimate electronic music right on your PSP. Much like the professional beat-making software you might find on a PC, it features thousands of sound clips—more than 1,200 of which were actually created by superstar producer Timbaland—that you can arrange and manipulate with a basic editing interface that attempts to balance depth with accessibility: You can start in Live Play, where you simply choose a pre-arranged song template and add sounds and loops on the fly. Then progress to the Studio, where you can carefully select loops and arrange them into an actual song. And finally, you can wind up in the Song Crafter, where you can meticulously adjust any pre-existing sound clip or even create your own using the PSP's mic. Best of all, once you're satisfied with your creation, you can export it to your computer (as a WAV file, in case you're curious) and share it with the rest of the community. So basically, you don't need to play an instrument to make music anymore—just like pretty much every Disney teen pop star. Scott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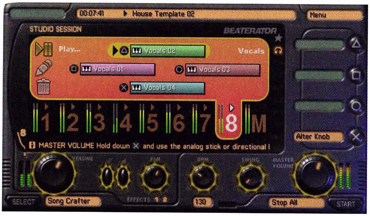
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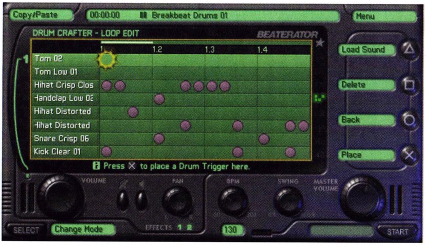
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Kick Clear 01
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Back
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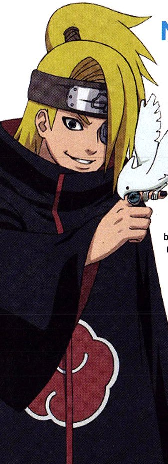
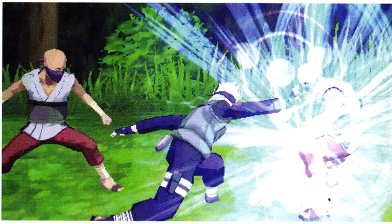


Naruto Shippuden: Legends: Akatsuku Rising Hands-On

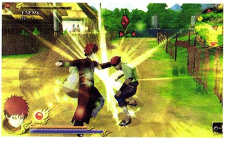
PSP AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Racjin

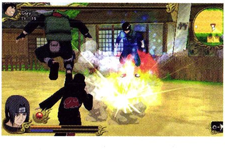


News flash! The most notorious criminal organization in the world has kidnapped everyone's favorite emo, darkly eyelined, sand-lovin' ninja! It's time to stage a rescue!

Okay, it's not much of a news flash if you've kept up with the *Naruto* manga or anime. It's the storyline in which Gaara's been kidnapped by the evil Akatsuki group and it's up to Naruto and company to rescue him. Those who adore the series can look forward to playing through those episodes and then checking out the Akatsuki mode, which features a new storyline that takes place in the same timeline but from the Akatsuki's side of the story. Those who don't already adore the series might be intrigued by the simple combat system, which has a single button for attacking and blocking (it's about timing) and an easily accessed Jutsu (magic) system (right shoulder + face button), or the two-player co-op. Whether you're in it for the story or the action, you'll have your chance to personally kick lots and lots of ninjas in the face as you rescue Gaara this October. Teresa

◂ Deidara may look like a friendly fellow, but he's an absolute psychopath.





UNCHARTED 2

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

AMONG THIEVES

Stunning. Smart. Spectacular. Adventure's new champion explodes onto PlayStation 3

BY ROB SMITH

A seat by the window on the train. A seemingly pleasant view. This all-too brief moment of tranquility is painfully interrupted by the realization that you're bleeding. "That's my blood," utters Nathan Drake, the playable hero of the *Uncharted* series, "that's my... that's a *lot* of my blood."

An object, large and traveling at some velocity, flies past Drake's head—not out the window: inside the train. The camera tilts slowly, pans backwards, and our jaw drops, as if to kick-start our now racing pulse. That heavy object wasn't flying—it was *falling*, because the entire train car you're sitting in is suddenly hanging vertically off a sheer cliff. Wow. That's not good.

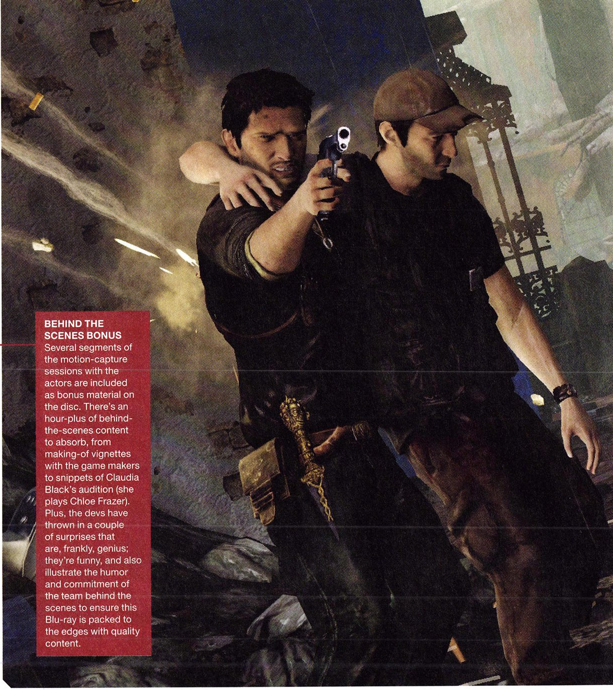
Drake is forced out of his seat and plummets down the train car's middle aisle, toward an open window that now leads directly to a doomed thousand-foot free-fall. At the last possible second as he falls through it, he snags a yellow guard rail by his fingertips, debris tumbling all around him into a deep, deep chasm. And with Drake's own death drop narrowly averted, you must set about finding a way to clamber up the train, trusting that whatever surface you can grasp will support your weight long enough to make the next leap of faith.

Tense, clever, cinematic, engaging, exhilarating—and that's only the first two minutes. Imagine how you'll feel after 15 hours of this same level of rollercoaster action, adventure, spelunking, exploration, and...romance. *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is the game you'll show off to your friends and family this holiday as the perfect illustration of PS3 gaming entering its prime.

PS3 **Price:** $59.99 | **ESRB:** Teen | **Publisher:** SCEA | **Developer:** Naughty Dog

ADVENTURE TRAVELOGUE

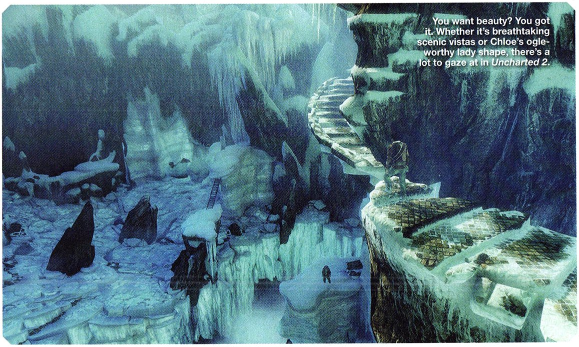
Nathan Drake is the ideal modern day action hero: daring and humble, defiant and bashful, tenacious and irrepressible. He's also good humored, a good shot, and good-looking. That might make him sound decidedly unlikable to your typical red-blooded bros-before-hos gamer, like Drake is the cool kid who you have to hate just because… But not in this case. This everyman will appeal to every man (and woman) because he has a legitimate personality. It's wonderfully conceived and so expertly played by motion-captured actor Nolan North that the emotion and context of each exchange doesn't have to be delivered through dialogue. A raised eyebrow, a hunch, a wagging finger all serve to shape the relationships with cinematic subtlety.



BEHIND THE SCENES BONUS

Several segments of the motion-capture sessions with the actors are included as bonus material on the disc. There's an hour-plus of behind-the-scenes content to absorb, from making-of vignettes with the game makers to snippets of Claudia Black's audition (she plays Chloe Frazer). Plus, the devs have thrown in a couple of surprises that are, frankly, genius; they're funny, and also illustrate the humor and commitment of the team behind the scenes to ensure this Blu-ray is packed to the edges with quality content.

You'll expect a certain degree of this if you played the original *Uncharted,* but the addition of a new femme fatale, Chloe Frazer, and new friend/enemy/treasure hunter Harry Flynn, as well as both Sully and Elena returning from the first game, and the ensemble cast takes videogame characters to a whole new level. And no, we haven't forgotten *Metal Gear Solid 4's* phenomenal performances, but *Uncharted 2* is right in the same league, the dynamics of each interaction propelling the characters on a wonder-ride to the mythical land of Shambhala, hidden in the mountains of Tibet.



You want beauty? You got it. Whether it's breathtaking scenic vistas or Chloe's ogle-worthy lady shape, there's a lot to gaze at in *Uncharted 2*.

The tale begins with Drake discovering that Marco Polo may have discovered Shambhala before his doomed voyage home from Asia. How doomed was it, you ask? 14 ships departed. One returned. So, yeah—lots of insurance paperwork after that one. But the history lesson is short-lived; Polo's influence over the tale quickly fades (and is all but forgotten by the end) as more modern nefarious forces are similarly tracking what's believed to be a massive sapphire. In fact, the story weaves a curious early arc. From the dynamic opening, a literal cliffhanger, you're cast back several months to play through multiple chapters of Drake's life. These capers introduce the rest

No man is left behind, even Jeff the cameraman. You'll fight alongside Elena, Chloe, Tenzin, and Harry in various situations, and they can all handle themselves pretty well..

> "The ensemble cast takes videogame characters to a whole new level."

of the cast, and explain how you found yourself dangling—yet again—near death. It also smoothes out the learning curve for newcomers who need time to get in the habit of moving around seemingly impassable and impossible situations with the guile of the cheekiest spider monkey. But it's still a little odd when you replay the opening sequence some time later in the game.

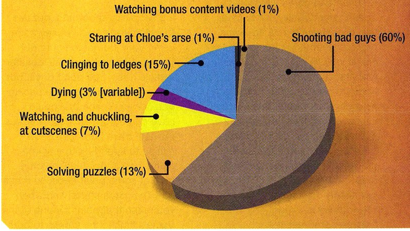
Still, you'll barely have time to notice the oddness because two polar opposite forces will dominate your attention: 1) legions of enemies loyal to Zoran Lazarevic, who emerges as a suitably villainous power-hungry despot, and 2) spectacular, and we mean, immense, breathtaking, simply staggering vistas and views. If we felt a moment of frustration across this globe-spanning opus, it was when a quiet moment spent in appreciation of the waterfalls, buildings nestled on mountainsides, birds fluttering from tree branches or even bats rushing from darkened dungeons was interrupted by the onslaught of increasingly well-armed and armored goons joining the party.

SIGHTS FOR SORE EYES

Truly, *Uncharted 2* is one of the most visually resplendent games we've yet seen on PS3. While the outdoor vistas speak for themselves, the texture detail, scale, and inventiveness of some of the interiors (even dank dungeons) is simply incredible. The Tibetan village where you meet with Tenzin

Uncharted 2 is:

How will you spend the game's 15-hour single-player escapade? We break it down:



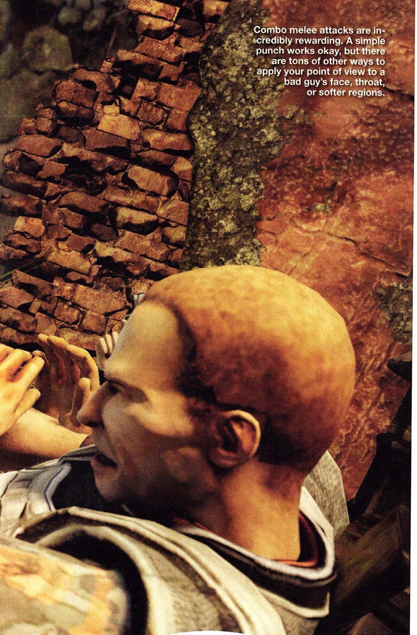
"Combat is varied; many battles allow for multiple strategies"

is alive with style and color. In a wonderful movie-like scene, you can take a moment to stop and smell the yak—make *sure* you try it—and it sets an emotional stage for events to come. *Uncharted 2* doesn't need to delve into location clichés such as a fire, wind, or water-themed areas to display visual variety. No two mountains look the same, no native domicile appears cookie cutter to the one next door, and while there is an ice cave, it makes perfect sense.

Divided across 26 chapters, the story isn't some massive globetrotting exercise, instead focusing on a handful of key, but keenly crafted locations. The journey is expertly balanced between progressively challenging set piece shootouts, puzzles that demand careful observation, using your journal to figure out your next move, and rollercoaster vehicle rides. You don't drive, but you won't soon forget the pacing of a convoy scene that could have come from an *Indiana Jones* movie if there had been $100 million to spend on that scene alone. You know you'll be on a train at some point because that's how the game starts, and when you reach that point it's one of the game's highlights, thanks to both the variation in action (including shooting down helicopters) and the stunning scenery.

The combat is surprisingly varied, and many battles allow for multiple strategies. Drake can sneak, and later in the game it makes a huge difference to your ammo management if you can take out a few distracted guards with a quick neck-break. Pulling guards off ledges to their death; sliding between their legs to deliver a knockout blow of the eye-watering, soprano-inducing kind; throwing them over your shoulder to break their backs; jumping over cover obstacles to lay a hammer fist smackdown. It's all tremendous fun (if you manage to stay alive).

Our favorite melee scene: running and gunning (it's more accurate and handy than you'd think, *if* you've got the ammo) along a balcony, we blast one guard then hit the Square button for a melee attack, incapacitating a second guard behind him. As a third foe rushes up a nearby staircase, we



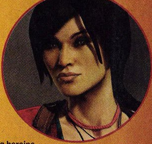
Combo melee attacks are incredibly rewarding. A simple punch works okay, but there are tons of other ways to apply your point of view to a bad guy's face, throat, or softer regions.

When a game opens with your train literally falling off a cliff, you know you're in for a wild ride.

Role Call

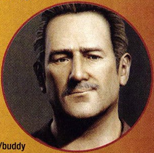
Thanks to great storytelling and motion-captured acting performances, you'll get to know this cast of players better than you'd ever imagine in a videogame.

NATHAN DRAKE | Leading man
THAT MEANS: The star of (most of) the show
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC: Fearless; strongest fingers on the planet; undiagnosed, unrealized death wish

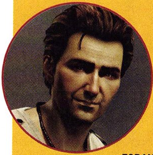


CHLOE FRAZER | Female foil
YOU'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER: Her first encounter with Drake
AND…: Her arse! (And accent, if you like sassy Australian-English)

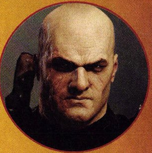
ELENA FISHER | Returning heroine from *Drake's Fortune*
SHOULDN'T SHE BE: A schoolteacher? Lab-coated researcher?
MOST LIKELY TO FIND HER: As the girl next door



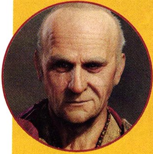
VICTOR SULLIVAN | Old friend
WOULD RATHER BE: Anywhere safer
TURNS OUT: Worth seeing the old devil at the end…



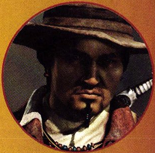
HARRY FLYNN | Sidekick/buddy
BUT CAN YOU REALLY COUNT ON: A guy with an English accent and slick hair
IF THIS WERE A TV SHOW: He might get his own spin-off series



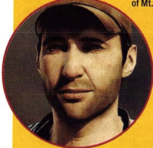
ZORAN LAZAREVIĆ | Arch-villain
YOU KNOW THAT BECAUSE: He has an Eastern-European accent and scars
ROLE MODELS: Genghis Khan, Hitler



KARL SCHÄFER | English-speaker in Nepal
NATIVE LANGUAGE: German
AND THAT MEANS: There may be mention of Nazis



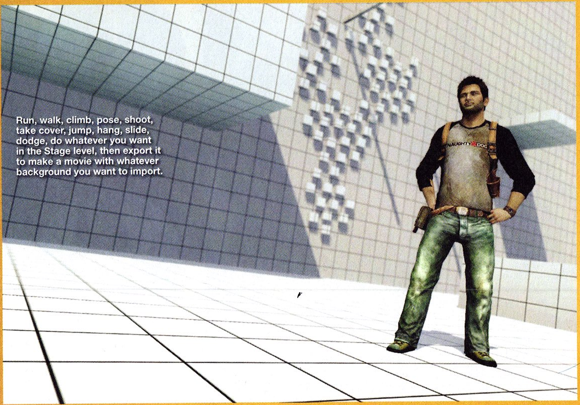
TENZIN | Chatty sidekick
SAY WHAT?! He speaks in his native dialect but with no translation
ANY RELATION TO: Sherpa Tenzing Norgay (who aided Sir Edmund Hillary in his ascent of Mt. Everest)? Do you even care?



JEFF THE CAMERAMAN | News cameraman
YOU'RE BEING FILMED? No, he's there with Elena to report on these weird activities
SHOULD HAVE WORN: A red shirt

CINEMA PARADISO

How crazy deep multiplayer replays enabled the ultimate machinima mode



Run, walk, climb, pose, shoot, take cover, jump, hang, slide, dodge, do whatever you want in the Stage level, then export it to make a movie with whatever background you want to import.

Every *Uncharted 2* multiplayer match (aside from co-op) is automatically recorded and saved in one of 30 slots. The game will let you know when the slots are full if you need to swap out your saved games. You have six slots available to upload these files to a server and share them with friends. Why? To study strategy, see how other people play, replay cool moments, find out how the hell that guy killed you, and figure out the best tactics and routes to improve your own performance.

But there's more to it than just honing your online skills. When you play back a recorded match, you can view it from any player's angle (using the D-pad to switch between views) or in free-cam mode, panning the camera around to pretty much any angle. You can pause, fast forward, and rewind the playback to the beginning (no actual frame by frame rewind, though), and even move the video forward frame-by-frame. Why is that important? To capture every nuance you want for making machinima movies.

There's no easy way to save out the files—the playbacks are game code, not video—so you'll need your own capture equipment. But those inclined to movie creation will no doubt be ready and able right from launch. Their options are expanded by fact that the in-game characters are lip-synced to whatever the player controlling them says. It's going to take patience, but this is how a simple dialogue could work:

Start a multiplayer map with just you and a friend using the Drake and Chloe models and selecting the Machinima game mode.

Meet in the map, and recite lines into your PS3 headsets (for the sake of argument, let's go with a Bogart and Bergman scene from *Casablanca).* Chloe now raises her pistol and shoots Drake in the noggin. Cut.

This "match" is saved to a slot, and the player loads the file and flies around the map, creating dramatic sweeps and other camera angles to capture the characters, and then exports this video to a recording device.

That file is then imported to a computer video-editing suite, the dialogue lines need to be re-recorded (the game saves video, but not audio) and then dubbed into the scene (but the lip-synching will ensure it appears fluid).

The video's timing is edited at leisure, and presto! A video ripe for YouTube.

No doubt you'll be able to get as creative as your imagination, ambition, and time constraints allow. But better yet is the inclusion of the Stage scene that you can load in Machinima mode. It basically provides a green-screen backdrop and all the weapons and objects from the game for you to mix and match, set your scenes, movement, character types, etc., and then dump out to superimpose on any background or scene you wish.

All that and we haven't even mentioned the visual tweaks you can apply to your scene. So you don't like the ambient light or its intensity? Change it using the sliders for color and clarity. Want to increase the fog effects? How about a color tint to the whole world, adjusted with three sliders for red, green, and blue? Or desaturate the color entirely for a stylish black-and-white look. You can even change the field of view (how zoomed in the camera is to the action), twist it to different angles, turn the world upside down, or apply a handy-cam effect to the follow cam that makes it look like the cameraman is bobbing along behind you during your match.

This mode is clearly not for beginners, but you can be pretty sure that within days of the game's release the first vignettes will appear online and be showcased through Naughty Dog's website.

> "This is the game you'll show off to your friends and family..."

bash Square again and Drake slides between this new target's legs, knocking the poor bastard out with a shot to the jewels. But the momentum of that attack sends us down the staircase, enabling us to melee two more guards: one on the way down and another with a fluid, hammerfist knockout as we reach the floor. It's fast, furious, and so rewarding we let out an audible whoop.

Of course, Drake also has plenty of tools for those moments when you just want to shoot a guy in the face. In addition to a full range of handguns, you've got heavier artillery ranging from the standard AK-47 to the awesome SAS shotgun or the M4, and upgrading your loadout over time is part of the joy of progress.

Ammo conservation becomes key in some of the bigger battles deeper into the game. Even the few heavy stationary machine guns that you can capture and use against the enemies have limited rounds, making you think before firing blindly. But speaking of blind firing, that's a pretty effective tactic too, as you crouch behind cover, rotate from cover point to cover point, and search out the best angles to take the best-aimed shot.

Aside from the 100 treasures to find—spot the blinking lights to locate them—you'll also earn medals for your combat success, scoring kills with the various weapons, headshots, multiple

TWEET YOUR TROPHIES

Want to let your followers know your exploits in *Uncharted 2?* Just select the Twitter option in the menu and then choose which of the alerts you want active. Turn on the multiplayer alert and the game will automatically update your Twitter feed (after you've input your username and password) that you're online and ready to play. Other options include letting folks know when you've leveled up or earned Trophies. We're betting we'll see this feature ripped off in many more games to come.

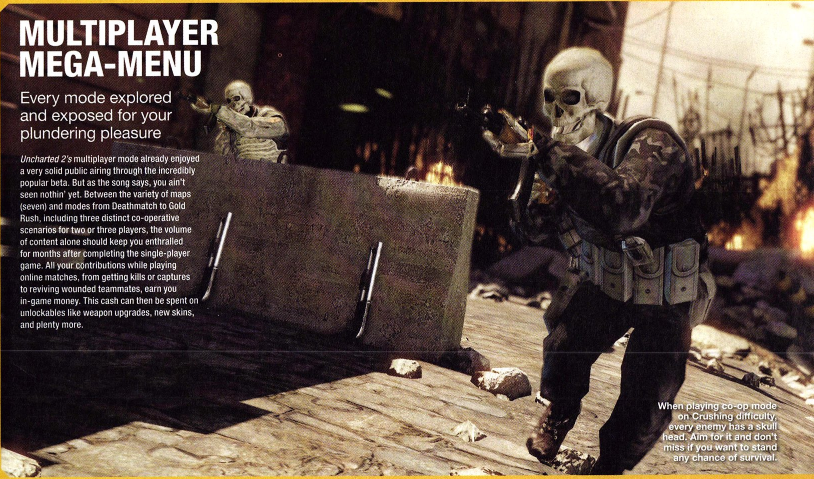
This is one spectacular train ride you won't forget, with a pulsating score and audio work adding incredible flavor to the action.

When not involved in shootouts you'll be figuring out puzzles. Some of these are absolutely spectacular, with you interacting with ancient idols or manipulating the environment to unlock the path to Shambhala.

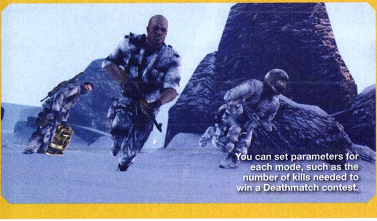
MULTIPLAYER MEGA-MENU

Every mode explored and exposed for your plundering pleasure

Uncharted 2's multiplayer mode already enjoyed a very solid public airing through the incredibly popular beta. But as the song says, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Between the variety of maps (seven) and modes from Deathmatch to Gold Rush, including three distinct co-operative scenarios for two or three players, the volume of content alone should keep you enthralled for months after completing the single-player game. All your contributions while playing online matches, from getting kills or captures to reviving wounded teammates, earn you in-game money. This cash can then be spent on unlockables like weapon upgrades, new skins, and plenty more.



When playing co-op mode on Crushing difficulty, every enemy has a skull head. Aim for it and don't miss if you want to stand any chance of survival.



You can set parameters for each mode, such as the number of kills needed to win a Deathmatch contest.

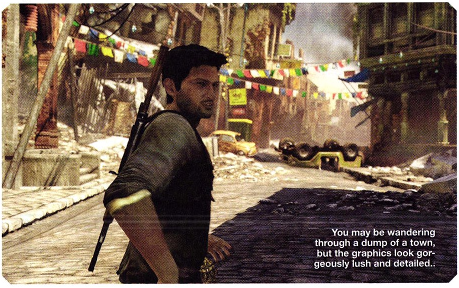
DEATHMATCH/TEAM DEATHMATCH
You know the drill. Kill the other guys. Your success is largely determined by your knowledge of where the best weapons are on any given map (unless you're playing modes such as Pistols and Grenades) and your ability to fire off accurate headshots. Headshots are vital.

KING OF THE HILL
Being the King is a ton of fun. As the other team bombards your position, you have to remain standing within the circled "hill" to maintain control. Pro tip: grenades are great for clearing out a team camped around the control point.

CHAIN REACTION
Capturing control points is fun enough, but this mode requires you to get all five in order. Indicators on the side of the screen point you to each location and show the team currently in control, but coordination with teammates about which points you're collectively attacking is key.

TURF WAR
Like Chain Reaction, but requires you to control three capture points that you can grab in any order.

PLUNDER
This is the treasure-hunting mode from the



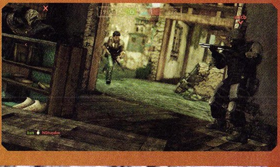
You may be wandering through a dump of a town, but the graphics look gorgeously lush and detailed.:

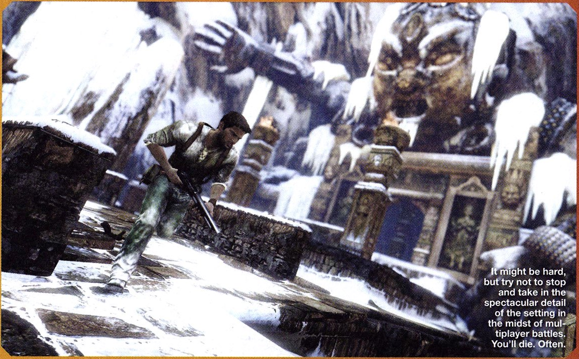
FAN APPRECIATION
One terrific touch: when you put in the *Uncharted 2* disc it will check whether you played *Drake's Fortune*. If you even booted the game up you'll earn $20,000 for your wallet, and if it detects you finished the original (on any difficulty) you'll get another $100,000. Terrific fan service, and it serves to set you on the path to bonus unlockables before you even start.

kills from a single grenade, and many, many more. With these medals comes cash, and that lets you delve into the game's economy, unlocking new skins, bonus content, weapon upgrades, and art galleries.

DANGER! DANGER, NATHAN DRAKE!

A number of our deaths as we played through were from misjudging jumps to a ledge that wasn't grasp-able or was out of range. We did have occasional difficulty gauging whether a ledge below us was something we could drop onto safely (with the





It might be hard, but try not to stop and take in the spectacular detail of the setting in the midst of multiplayer battles. You'll die. Often.

beta. You retrieve a treasure and throw it across the map to your home base to score the win.

SURVIVAL

This co-op mode is playable on four maps (The Plaza, Sanctuary, The Lost City, and The Village) and requires you and your teammates to stay alive through 10 rounds of increasingly difficult enemy invasions. The enemies get tougher and more numerous with each successive round, with the biggest cash bonus awarded if you survive through all 10 rounds.

GOLD RUSH

An awesome co-operative experience with two friends against numerous rounds of progressively challenging enemies. This time you have to get to a treasure (same as in Plunder) that appears in a random location on the map (any of the four available in Survival) and get it to your home base. The random location means it can spawn in the later rounds in a spot surrounded by the GAU-firing, heavily armored "Heavies", so it'll take a ton of skill and some serious weapon upgrades to power through all 10 levels. Adding the "Rush" to the experience is a timer that starts as a 3X score multiplier and steadily drops as you take more time to complete the objective.

CO-OPERATIVE OBJECTIVES

Unique cutscenes and special interactive segments make finding a couple buddies to accompany you through these three options an absolute must. You start with Normal difficulty, and then Hard and Crushing are unlocked when you complete the tasks (in these modes, friendly fire is on and grenades are deadly!)

THE VILLAGE

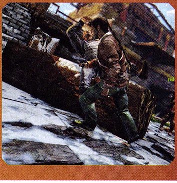
Fighting through the Tibetan village with Tenzin and Elena (the game host is always Drake) you'll fight Heavies, a tank, and helicopters. Keen coordination is required to scavenge for the RPGs needed to take them down.

THE SANCTUARY

The name is misleading; this is no casual saunter through a spiritual hidey-hole in the mountains. It's crawling with the bad guy's men, including the heavier-armored, SAS shotgun-wielding thugs who require several headshots to take down and who will assault your position from above, below, and all sides.

NEPAL WARZONE

If you played these war-ravaged streets in the beta, you know all about getting a boost up and accessing new areas with the aid of your cohorts, and fighting wave after wave of enemies emerging from windows and behind cars (you know the cars explode if you shoot them enough to set 'em on fire, right?)



> "Uncharted 2 is this season's biggest PS3 victory."

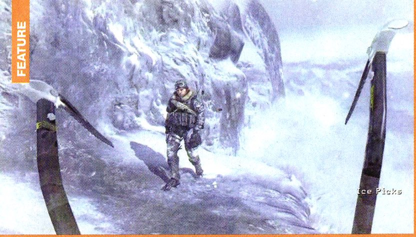
Circle button) or whether it would be a death leap into oblivion. We called it wrong a few times.

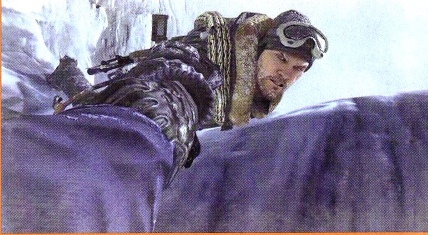
On Normal, the third of five difficulty levels (a Very Easy has been added for über-noobs and Crushing is unlocked after completing the game) you'll still likely die. A lot. But there's a great chance it will be in a unique circumstance, taking a different route or trying a varied strategy on the reload. Even when engaged in puzzle solving, Drake's in danger—usually from falling from a great height, but it rarely proved frustrating. In fact, we died once, accidentally, and were legitimately happy to have to sit through one of the wonderful vignette cutscenes again, hear the dialogue, see another tiny facial movement that revealed its own story, providing its own background to these relationships.

Let's face it, based off the solid foundation of the first game, and given its showings to date, we were expecting good things from *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*. The game is a veritable master class of all-round game development. From a sensational single-player experience that never takes any short-cuts and maintains its story's mythological credibility right to the end to the co-operative online play to the robust, balanced, and just plain fun multiplayer modes, this is a package of content that more than earns its $60 price tag. It's a game that'll show off your gaming skills, the power of your PS3, your TV's HD performance, and even your audio setup to the best of all their abilities. That, for all of us, is a win, and *Uncharted 2* is this season's biggest PS3 victory.

Rob Smith

★★★★★





So you've made the best military shooter ever... now what?

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is so hot, we went hands-on and came away on fire

BY JAMES COATES

Death-defying snowmobile escapes are hardly part of a normal mission briefing. But then, first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is hardly just a normal game. It's the most anticipated game of the year, the sequel to a full-on masterpiece of atmosphere and action. That's why, in our hands-on session with two of *MW2's* single-player missions, a dash of its co-op, and a few other juicy teasers, we weren't surprised (though we were impressed) to experience a mountain chase so thrilling and gut-wrenching, it almost gave us vertigo.

The plan was to scale a mountain, climbing thousands of feet into the air with ice axes and leaping over a frozen abyss, to assault a hidden terrorist camp. The only cover necessary, as an unidentified soldier in a thick parka leads the way up, is the blizzard that swallows up everything around us in a thick blanket of white.

We stop for a moment and our mystery companion, who was hidden by his bulky parka hood, unveils himself. It's not our beloved former commanding officer Capt. Price, who's still MIA from the previous game, but we do recognize him—he's *us.* At least, he was in the last game; it's the unexpectedly familiar face of Capt. "Soap" MacTavish, one of the playable characters in the previous *Modern Warfare,* and he's still looking tough. The game engine has been completely overhauled, enabling its characters and environments to be rendered in crisper detail than ever before—everything from the frost on Soap's beard to the custom print on his rifle's clip looks great. He turns to your character and announces, "Break's over, Roach. Let's go."

At the outskirts of the terrorist camp, the two of us stalk pairs of guards using weapon-mounted heartbeat monitors and synchronized bursts of suppressed fire, eliminating them while they're still just shadowy forms in the ever-present snow. With the immediate area clear, MacTavish finds a vantage point and provides cover fire as we move in to plant C4 charges among the compound's fuel tanks. So far, this is exactly the kind of thing we love about *Modern Warfare.* With the C4 planted, we move to inside the base and split up.

That's when it happens.

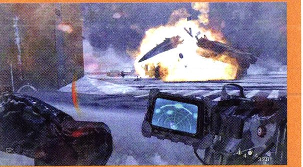
The radio cackles to life with the urgent message, "Go to plan B!" and the mood shifts from cautious and calculated to improvised and full of bullets—the terrorists have discovered Soap and are now swarming in from all directions. Add the sudden warm glow of exploding fuel tanks—thank you, C4—and Soap barking out orders while sprinting down a runway and gunning down startled attackers, and we're starting to see how *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is upping the ante. And that's *before* the snowmobiles start roaring down a nearby hill.

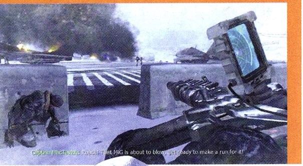
Plan "B" is for "better"

With a brutal swing of his axe, Soap carves an enemy rider off his craft and yells at you to get on. For the first time in a *Modern Warfare* game, you're driving the vehicle, and it's nothing like a typical rumble over the opposition in an eight-inch armor clad tank.

Outnumbered, we speed off for a wooded area—a dangerous faux pas on a snowmobile, but it doesn't discourage the terrorists. They pursue us into the trees, riding in pairs so one can shoot while the other drives. And as if that wasn't life-threatening enough, there's a helicopter in hot pursuit as well, peppering our path with streams of machine gun fire.

Luckily, Roach only needs one hand to steer, and when our pursuers cross in front, we can use our free hand to shoot and send them tipping, careening away from us and—with a little luck—into the nearest tree. Long, tense moments pass, and just as it looks like the trees are getting too dense to keep this dangerous race up any longer, there's an opening and we rocket toward—and off—a cliff at full speed, launching ourselves to safety on the other side, where we can ➔





Captain MacTavish: Roach! That MiG is about to blow, get ready to make a run for it!

finally exhale. This is the *Modern Warfare* we all know and love, with more of everything. Particularly snowmobiles.

We only have limited knowledge of the story so far—developer Infinity Ward is keeping it under wraps until the game's release. What we do know is that the story picks up shortly after the first *Modern Warfare* ends. The terrorist leader, Zakhaev, was killed in the previous game, but you can't stop a terrorist group by taking out just one man. His death has left the top spot open for the ambitious wacko Makarov, the former right-hand man of Zakhaev. He's actually even crazier, and has grand plans now that his ex-boss isn't around to keep him in check.

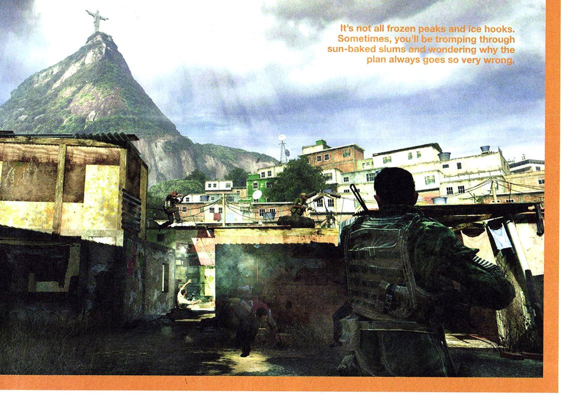
The shifting forces of terror have prompted Western nations to create a special group, Taskforce 141, to counter the evolved threat. The taskforce is comprised of a sampler platter of elite soldiers, SAS, CIA, Navy SEALs, etc., which should help to keep the gameplay diverse. *Modern Warfare 2* will be played from several perspectives, just as the previous game was. This means you might take the role of a marine in a relatively straightforward attack and secure mission and follow that up with a covert operation as a CIA agent. Even better, it means you won't always be a guy named Roach.

Elite of the elite

In another similarity to its predecessor, *Modern Warfare 2* will take you all around the world. The second mission we saw takes place in the much warmer, lower climate of Rio de Janeiro, and this time you'll be playing as…Roach again. He's tracked an arms dealer to a South American slum with Capt. Soap.

It's supposed to be a simple surveillance mission, but as typically happens, things don't unfold quite according to plan. A rival gang shows up as our vehicle follows the suspect and a firefight erupts. Plenty of people are killed, but the target is unhurt and he makes a run for it. A stray bullet smashes through our driver's head, splattering his brains on the dashboard, and again, it's time to resort to plan B: in this case, chasing the suspect on foot through the crowded slums of Rio.

The first thing we notice is that this isn't a warzone; it's a town. There are militia trying to kill you, but innocent civilians also crowd the streets. As expected, when Soap and Roach pull out weapons and huff it down the road, it creates a ripple of screaming and chaos. With so much happening, it would be easy to lose the mark along the zigzagging streets, but we keep up long enough to reach a small



It's not all frozen peaks and ice hooks. Sometimes, you'll be tromping through sun-baked slums and wondering why the plan always goes so very wrong.

alley with a clear line of sight to our quarry. Soap gives the order to shoot but not kill, so we render the target immobile with a spray of gunfire across his legs. The level ends with a quick cut to a short while later, when the always jovial Soap ominously intones "This could take awhile," as he approaches the bound suspect to begin interrogation. We have no idea what he wants to ask about, but there's little doubt he's going to get some answers one way or another.

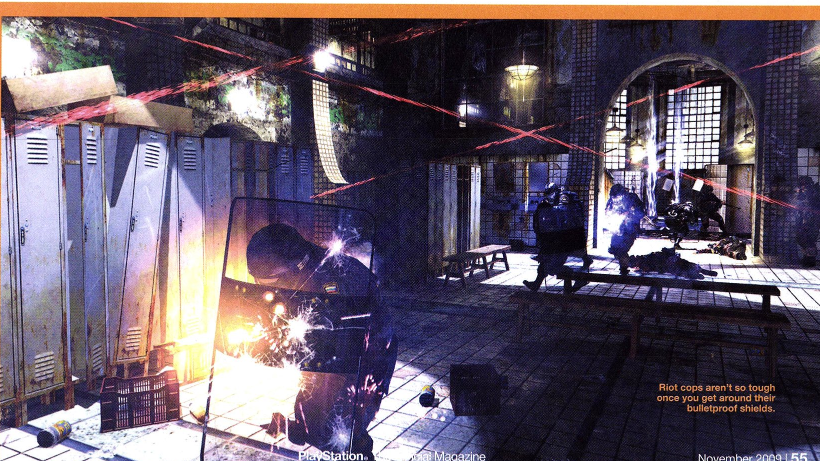
The civilians in Rio add an interesting, potentially gut-wrenching element to a combat zone, but we were also impressed by the size and layout of both levels. The slum town in particular is full of different routes and areas. The game isn't fully open world now, but in the areas that it makes sense, the environments won't try to corral you into a particular path. The idea is to give the player more options to solve a problem and force you to change strategy in response to your environment if you want to succeed. But dont get cocky; the enemy AI will respond to your actions as well. A gunman might assault you from a window if you go one way but exit the building and try to flank you if you turn around and go another way.

You and me against the world

There is no co-op story mode amid the multiplayer options, but that doesn't mean there's no multiplayer at all. Instead, *Modern Warfare 2* has created a set of separate challenges called Special Ops. These are designed to be tough, since you'll have a teammate there to help you, and they'll feature a specific goal, like completing a mission as quickly as possible, so you can compare your scores with friends.

Gulag is a Special Ops level that takes place in a Russian prison shower where you fend off waves of riot police carrying shields. Barred windows and a grimy tiled floor and walls create a stark, harsh setting against the guard's laser sights sweeping through rooms. Because your enemies carry riot shields, you'll have to work together with your partner to flank the targets in order to do any damage. There will, of course, be competitive multiplayer modes as well, but Infinity Ward is keeping the lid on them for now.

There's a lot we still don't know about *Modern Warfare 2.* Asking what happened to Capt. Price at the end of the previous game has always gotten a "no comment" from Infinity Ward, but Soap being promoted to Captain probably isn't a good sign. Then again, if *MW2* was a more predictable game, our session would have ended after 40 minutes of gameplay, with two soldiers stranded near the summit of a mountain, unable to find any awesome snow-traversing vehicles to facilitate a hair-raising escape. Still, the previous game is *beloved*—can the sequel live up to gamers' insanely high expectations? Given expanded environments, dynamic AI responses, overhauled graphics and at least one soldier with an insect-related nickname, it's tough not to expect it to at least come really damn close. ■



Riot cops aren't so tough once you get around their bulletproof shields.

ASTEROIDS
EverQuest
Prince of Persia The Sands of Time
Hitman
inFAMOUS
Just Cause
Uncharted Drake's Fortune
Mass Effect
Lost Planet Extreme Condition
Dante's Inferno
Tomb Raider
Kane & Lynch Dead Men
Dead Space
SpyHunter Nowhere to Run
Mortal Kombat

HOLLYWOOD REMAINS GAME CRAZY

Get your popcorn and settle in. Here's your essential guide to upcoming videogame movies

Despite the box office disappointments of most videogame-to-film adaptations and the collapse of recent *Halo* and *BioShock* film projects, Hollywood remains infatuated with videogames. True, game-based flicks usually miss the mark, but we're optimistic that bigger budgets and better talent can finally deliver a few truly awesome game movies. Which of these contenders would you pick?.

BY JOHN GAUDIOSI

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Coming: 2011

The hit PS3 game series is being worked into a potential film *franchise* for Sony Pictures. PlayStation 3 fans immediately identified with Nathan Drake's hip, modern Indiana Jones-type character. Like the first *Uncharted,* the initial film will focus on the search for the Lost City of El Dorado, but will also involve modern day pirates. The film's action won't be relegated to an island though, which should enable the filmmakers to send Drake ranging across a variety of exotic locales. Kyle Ward is writing the script. No word on casting, but we've heard rumors of Matthew McConaughey as Drake. We're not wild about that, but we can live with it if Kristen Bell is cast as Elena. Deal?

Mortal Kombat 3

Coming: 2010

A third *MK* movie is in the works and it's going to be a re-boot of the popular '90s franchise rather than a sequel. The first videogame adaptation shot in 3D, the movie was actually supposed to be filmed in Louisiana before Hurricane Katrina hit, so plans have changed. But the movie is moving forward.

Lost Planet

Coming: 2011

David Hayter, voice of *Metal Gear Solid's* main character Solid Snake and *X-Men* scriptwriter, is penning the script for the film, which will recreate the ice planet setting of the game but introduce an original angle on the story.

Mass Effect

Coming: 2012

Producer Ari Arad describes his take on *Mass Effect's* first human spectre (secret agent) as *Casino Royale* meets *The Bourne Identity* (though obviously with more ray guns and aliens). Arad is working closely with developer BioWare's founders Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk on the film adaptation, and has said the process has been made easier thanks to the game's massive bible.

EverQuest

Coming: 2010

With Sony Online Entertainment celebrating 10 years of *EverQuest,* there's finally a movie in the works based on the popular MMO game. Yet another Arad Productions game adaptation, Ari Arad said the film will focus on the villain Innoruuk and a number of NPCs from the game. With so many characters to choose from, the process has been slow. But the movie is definitely happening.

Asteroids

Coming: 2012

When did not having a plot ever stop Hollywood from making a movie? Universal Pictures, which recently shelved the *BioShock* movie because of budget concerns, is now adapting the classic Atari arcade game *Asteroids.* Lorenzo di Bonaventura, the exec who brought the G.I. Joe and Transformers toys to the big screen, is producing and screenwriter Matthew Lopez is working on the script. We can only assume it involves space rocks, rocket ships, UFOs, and hyperspace. And maybe people, if the rocks can't hold down 90 minutes of dialogue.

Tomb Raider

Coming: 2012

Angelina Jolie has officially retired as Lara Croft. Producer David Lin *(Terminator Salvation)* is working on a reboot of the film franchise for Warner Bros. Pictures. The origin story will feature a much younger Croft and Lin has said the film will be more realistic than the Paramount Pictures adaptations. Megan Fox has denied that she's going to be the new Croft, but we're going to choose to ignore that denial, both because she's a big gamer in real life and because we think she'd look fantastic in Lara's slinky wetsuit.

Hitman 2

Coming: 2011

Producer Adrian Askarieh and 20th Century Fox made $100 million on the first *Hitman* film, so a sequel is currently underway. Screenwriter Kyle Ward is writing a script that will incorporate elements from the upcoming *Hitman 5* game, set for release in late 2010. The new film will focus on Agent 47 at a low point in his career as he tries to regain his reputation as the best assassin in the world. Timothy Olyphant previously said he'd be open to a sequel, but the actor is currently busy with FX's new TV series *Lawman,* so another actor may get the call to shave his head and get a UPC code tattooed on his neck—y'know, so he's less conspicuous.

Kane & Lynch

Coming: 2011

Bruce Willis is reportedly set to star as Kane in the film adaptation of publisher Eidos' videogame about a mercenary and a schizophrenic killer who become best buddies. Rumors of Mickey Rourke or Billy Bob Thornton playing Lynch are unconfirmed so far. The interesting thing about this film is that it was greenlit before the game even debuted. But a game sequel is in the works, so perhaps it wasn't so crazy after all.

Spy Hunter

Coming: 2012

Warner Bros. is the new home for this Midway classic, thanks to the studio's purchase of Midway Games' assets. At one point, when Universal Pictures had the rights, John Woo was set to direct Dwayne Johnson (The Rock) in what was supposed to be a series of popcorn spy movies. With The Rock now starring in Disney kids' movies, the direction of this film is up in the air. Is there any doubt Jason Statham *(Crank, High Voltage, Death Race)* will eventually get attached?

Just Cause

Coming: 2011

Producer Adrian Askarieh has raised $30 million to produce the movie independently. The film will focus on a CIA operative sent in to overthrow a South American regime. The game's Rico Rodriguez will be called The Scorpion in the new action movie, which doesn't have a script or a studio yet. But Eidos does have a game sequel in the works for 2010, so we'd like to see a tie-in release date, but 2011 is far more likely.

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Coming: May 28, 2010

In addition to Producer Jerry Bruckheimer starting his own game company, he's filmed his first game adaptation. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* is the first of a planned trilogy of Walt Disney films starring Jake Gyllenhaal—who, as the internet repeatedly points out, is about as Persian as Swedish meatballs—as the Prince. The game's creator, Jordan Mechner, pens the first film's storyline. Ben Kingsley plays Nizam and Alfred Molina brings Sheik Amar to life on the big screen. We're skeptical, but hey: *Pirates of the Caribbean* rocked, so this could work.

Dead Space

Coming: 2011

Publisher Electronic Arts, which also has a movie based upon *The Sims* in development at 20th Century Fox, is taking *Dead Space* to Hollywood. Eagle Eye director D.J. Caruso is bringing the space horror game to the big screen. The film will be set in the 26th century and follow the adventure from the first game. No writer has been attached yet.

Dante's Inferno

Coming: 2011

Universal Pictures won the bidding war for Electronic Arts' Mature-rated take on the epic poem. Dan Harris is writing the movie script, which is being produced by Strike Entertainment and EA. The film will explore the seven levels of Hell that the player must traverse. Expect tiny pieces of plot scattered among huge bloody chunks of action.

Gears of War

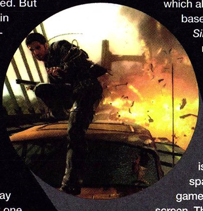
Coming: 2010

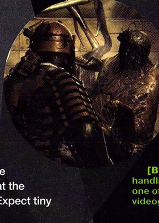
New Line Entertainment is moving forward with a big budget adaptation of Epic Games' *Gears of War.* Len Wiseman *(Live Free or Die Hard)* is directing a script by Chris Morgan. The live action film will be a prequel, exploring the game universe before the events of the first game and showcasing Emergence Day, when an army of savage, subterranean humanoids called the Locust Horde begins to pour out of the ground and attack. The film is currently being storyboarded.

InFamous

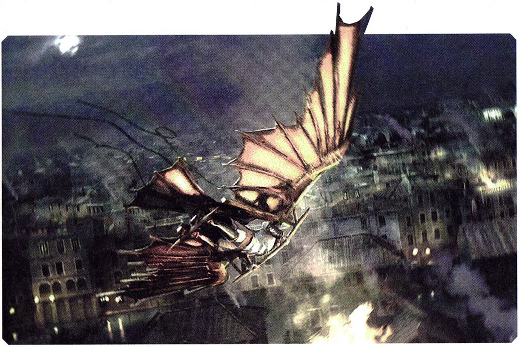
Coming: 2011

With synergy in their hearts, the folks at Sony Pictures will bring developer Sucker Punch's *inFamous*—a PS3 exclusive—to the big screen. Sheldon Turner is writing the script and Arad Productions, led by the producer of *Iron Man, Spider-Man, X-Men,* and pretty much every other superhero film of the last decade, is on board to ensure a smooth translation to the silver screen. ■





[Top Left] With its love of explosions and complete disregard of reality, *Just Cause* is perfect fodder for a film. **[Above]** Lightning hands, complex moral decisions, and at least one uncomfortably sexy snake lady—it's as if *inFamous* was meant to be a movie all along. **[Bottom Left]** With the right handling, *Dead Space* could be one of the scariest films ever, videogame-based or not.



Assassin's Creed II

By Paul Ryan

How do you improve upon excellence? We peer under the cowl of this mysterious new killer

When *Assassin's Creed* released in 2007, it pushed the limits of open-world action, stealth, and non-linear storytelling. Part science fiction and part historical fantasy, the game's plot bounced back and forth between the years 2012 and 1191. Players took on the role of Desmond Miles, a seemingly average bartender, who finds himself kidnapped by a mysterious corporation with a device that can draw out the latent memories of the user's ancestors through his DNA. As the game progresses, you played the roles of both the captive Desmond and also his ancient ancestor, Altaïr Ibn La-Ahad, who happened to be an assassin. The overall experience was heady, unique, and—most importantly—a whole lot of fun.

Fast-forward past the cliffhanger ending of the original (both because it sucked and because we want to spoil as little as possible), and Desmond is still a prisoner with more questions than answers. But this time, he'll be diving into the life of another ancestral assassin, Ezio Auditore de Firenze, whose memories of 1476 Italy lie dormant in Desmond's DNA.

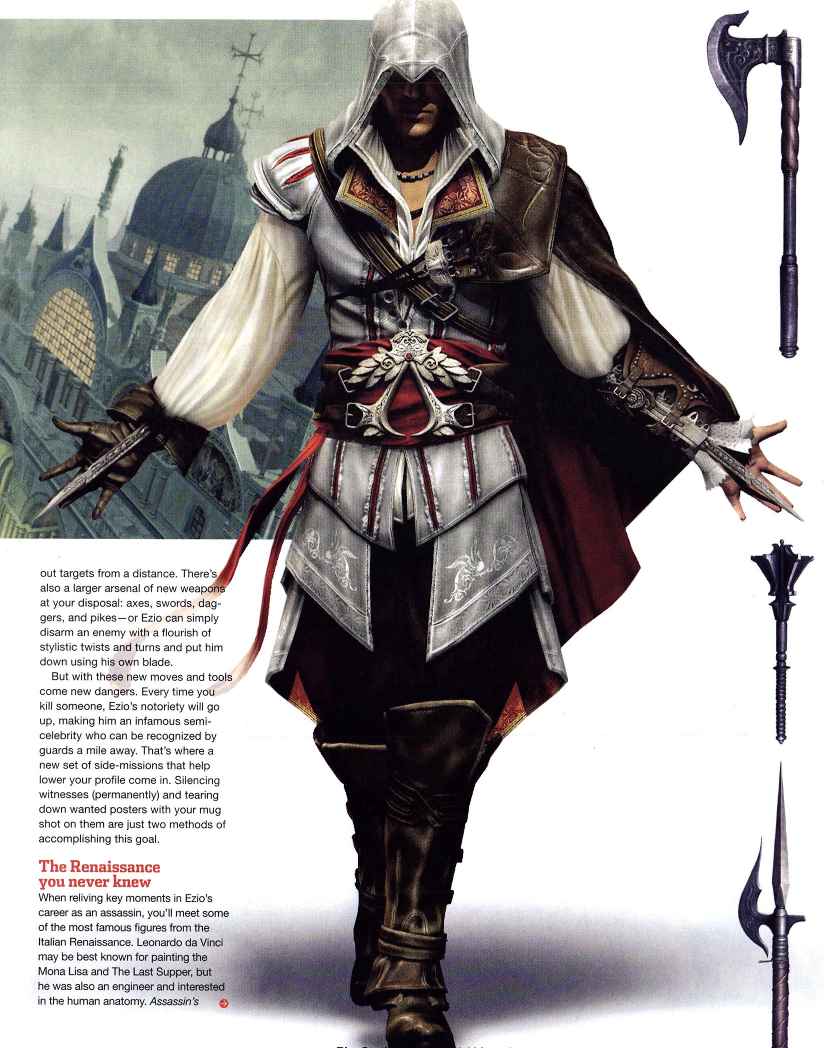
A killer with culture

Ezio may look a lot like his predecessor from the first *Assassin's Creed,* but peer closer and you'll find a slew of deadly new tricks up his robed sleeve. Unlike the rather anonymous Altaïr, Ezio is a 13th century Florentine noble, a man of culture, education, and wealth. He's definitely not the silent type. With a set of flashier moves, new weapons, and a passion for the art of conversation, Ezio looks like he's packing a lot more personality and deadly techniques than his more stoic relative.

Moving with purpose

It has been confirmed that Ezio will be stabbing his way through Florence, the Tuscan countryside, and Rome. There's also Venice and its famous canals to navigate. Expect to get more than your feet wet when exploring these romanticized waterways. Taking advantage of the canals' murky water, Ezio will be able to take enemy guards by surprise, pulling them down into the depths for silent kills. New moves, like Climb Leap, will also help Ezio scale buildings with ease. In fact, nothing seems to be off-limits when it comes to upgrades. Case in point: Ezio can actually fly thanks to a glider provided by Leonardo da Vinci. By taking advantage of thermals from fires on land, Ezio glides over rooftops and swoops down on his prey from above.

Ezio's hand-to-hand combat skills have received a ton of upgrades as well. His twin wrist blades now enable you to simultaneously kill two different enemies—and one of them packs some additional punch with a gun-powder-powered firearm that can take



out targets from a distance. There's also a larger arsenal of new weapons at your disposal: axes, swords, daggers, and pikes—or Ezio can simply disarm an enemy with a flourish of stylistic twists and turns and put him down using his own blade.

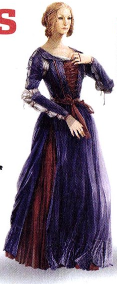
But with these new moves and tools come new dangers. Every time you kill someone, Ezio's notoriety will go up, making him an infamous semi-celebrity who can be recognized by guards a mile away. That's where a new set of side-missions that help lower your profile come in. Silencing witnesses (permanently) and tearing down wanted posters with your mug shot on them are just two methods of accomplishing this goal.

The Renaissance you never knew

When reliving key moments in Ezio's career as an assassin, you'll meet some of the most famous figures from the Italian Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci may be best known for painting the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper, but he was also an engineer and interested in the human anatomy. *Assassin's* ➔

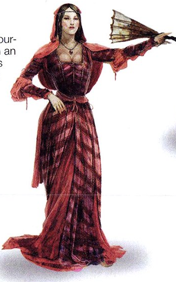
Allies and Enemies

Legions of militia men stand between you and your target—but you are not alone



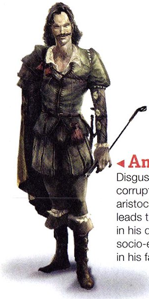
◂ Caterina Sforza

Nothing makes men madder than a politically powerful woman. We're betting that side-missions involving this influential countess will be tied to the death of the Pope and the riots in Rome that followed.



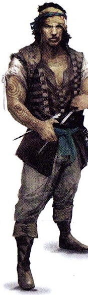
▸ Paula

This former rape victim rules the courtesan faction with an iron fan, but looks out for her young girls like a sexy mother superior.



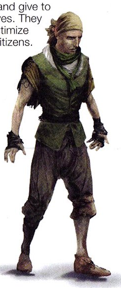
◂ Antonio

Disgusted with the corrupt and affluent aristocracy, Antonio leads the thieves guild in his quest to tip the socio-economic scales in his favor.



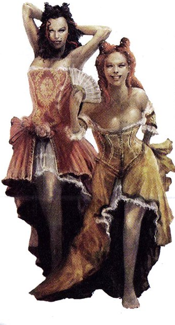
▸ Mercenaries

Little is known about this mysterious faction, but we're betting that murder and money play a big role in their business model.



▾ Thieves

A band of Robin Hoods who steal from the rich and give to themselves. They never victimize honest citizens.



◂ Courtesans

Men still think with their codpiece during the Italian Renaissance. Hire these ladies of the night to distract guards with their cleavage while you sneak by.

▸ Militia Archer

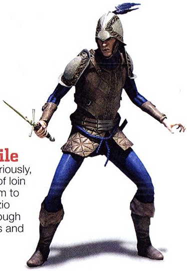
They're the guards you love to hate, keeping you pinned down as you try to execute your amazing escapes. It makes feeding them a dagger sandwich all the more satisfying

▴ Militia Swordsman

The various militia henchmen are the most common foe that Ezio will encounter. They come in multiple variations, each equally unsavory.

◂ Elite Parano

Thanks to his eagle eyes, the Parano is particularly skilled at spotting intruders before stabbing them with his big pointy stick.



▸ Elite Agile

Don't laugh. Seriously, don't. His lack of loin armor allows him to keep up with Ezio as you race through crowded streets and alleyways.

▸ Elite Brute

He likes heavy metal (as in actual metal), thrashing dissenters, and long walks through puddles of your blood. Take care when engaging this heavily armored beast.

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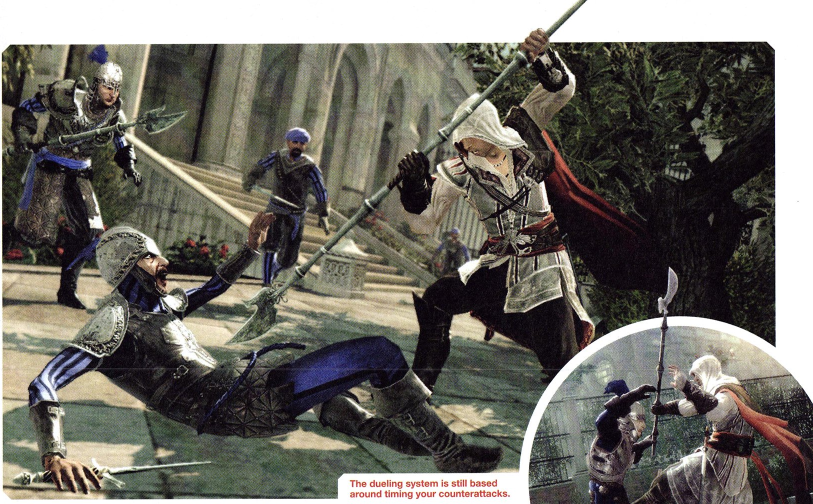


The dueling system is still based around timing your counterattacks.

Creed 2 is running with da Vinci's interest in weapons and machinery by making him Ezio's supplier of new upgrades and gadgets. Expect similar deviations from history with characters like Caterina Sforza, a powerful aristocrat who acted as an influential liaison between Roman and Italian courts—and Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli, a philosopher and writer best known for his political theories on how to properly manipulate and control the masses.

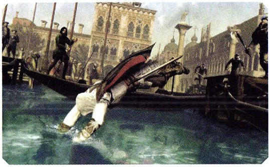
But *Assassin's Creed II* won't be solely focused on aristocrats, artists, and famous figures who haunt the pages of history textbooks. Ezio will also spend lots of time with the seedier side of the Italian Renaissance. Many assassination targets will be assigned by new factions of thieves, mercenaries and courtesans in each city. Each group offers a plethora of underhanded services to sell you. Need to distract a troublesome troupe of guards? Hire some buxom courtesans to draw their attention while you slip by unseen. Your standing with these new factions will improve as you perform more missions for them, lowering the costs of their services. So it's worth your time to stay on their good side as you proceed through the game's main missions.

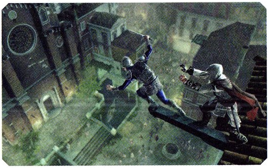
But these goods and services aren't free—you'll need a good amount of coin to get what you need. That's where the new economy system comes into play. Ezio can pick-pocket for cash, loot corpses, and complete side-missions to pay the bills for these perks. It sounds like a great way to encourage exploration and experimentation, so you get to know each of the game's gorgeous cities like the back of your hand.

There's a lot to be excited about. With an armory of new weapons, gadgets, dubious factions, combat moves, and a fascinating cast of characters—all set during one of the most triumphant and tumultuous times in Western history—*Assassin's Creed II* is shaping up to be a mighty ambitious sequel that aims to deliver the goods where it counts most. And considering we would have been cool just stabbing hundreds of people in the neck, this sounds like a dream come true. ■

_AC II_ is an ambitious sequel that aims to deliver the goods.

Expect an even greater focus on environmental kills—silently pulling a guard into the water or pushing him off a rooftop.





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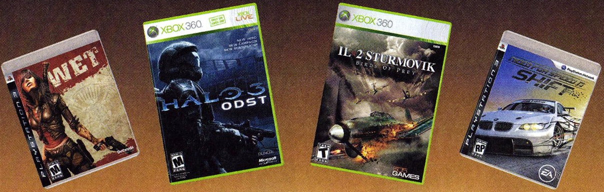
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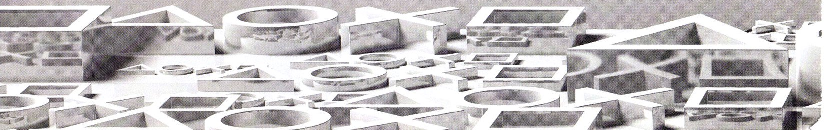

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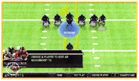
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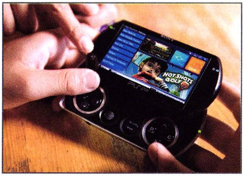

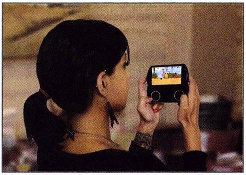

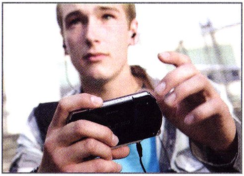

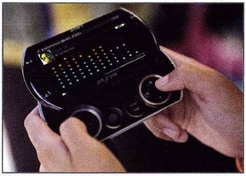

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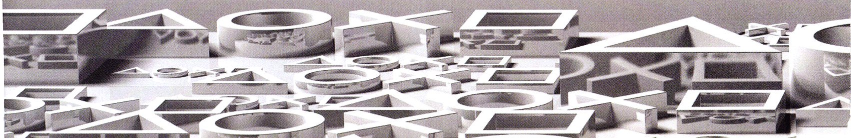

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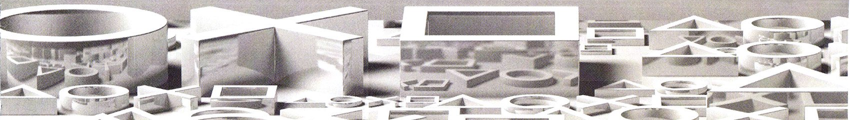


Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice

RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

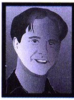
Win junk from Eric's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "November Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues

1) **Uncharted 2: Among Thieves** p. 42 ★★★★★
2) **Batman: Arkham Asylum** | PS3 | Oct 09 ★★★★★
3) **Prototype** | PS3 | Sept 09 ★★★★
4) **Fight Night Round 4** | PS3 | Aug 09 ★★★★★
5) **Wolverine** | PS3 | July 09 ★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Ooh treasures! What plunder-worthy possessions would the PTOM crew choose to be buried with?



ERIC BRATCHER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Eric's a hoarder, so whoever finds his tomb is going to need a U-haul. They'll get several guitars and basses, including his beloved blue flame Ovation Elite 1778-T, plus his MAME arcade cabinet, and far more Godzilla figures than anyone needs. They'll also get the truly priceless things: his denim-covered bible, his wedding ring, and pictures of his amazing wife and pet pig.

NOW PLAYING: *Street Fighter IV, Fallout 3, Fat Princess*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Teresa will need a big coffin, 'cause she wants to buried with all her loved ones. ("Muahaha! Don't worry PTOM staff, you guys are safe.") She'd also want one Phoenix Down, with very careful instructions on how to administer it, and a few handfuls of Gysahl Greens, so she could summon a herd of Chocobos and everyone could ride free into the sunset. Yeah, sure, Teresa.

NOW PLAYING: *FFVII, SoulCalibur: Broken Destiny, Badman, Street Fighter IV*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Assuming that his bulky, fancy wedding ring from Paris was still on his finger and that he's wearing his Liverpool jersey and his Ray-Ban Balorama sunglasses, Ken would like to be buried with his Official MLS soccer ball, the latest version of *FIFA*, and a little tin of Cohiba Black Pequeno cigars, just in case he needs to offer someone a bit of hospitality in the afterlife. How very thoughtful.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*, but (still) anxiously awaiting *FIFA Soccer 10*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

If someone were to dig Carlos up, they'd find him decked out in a bunch of "weird stuff." For starters, he'd be buried just outside of Las Vegas, in a Chevy Nova. He would be wearing knights' armor and holding a samurai sword. Plus, the car would be filled with bobbleheads and snow globes. "Come dig me up sometime," he invites. Uh, no thanks. That's creepy, Carlos.

NOW PLAYING: *Condemned 2, Guitar Hero: Metallica, Guitar Hero: World Tour*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

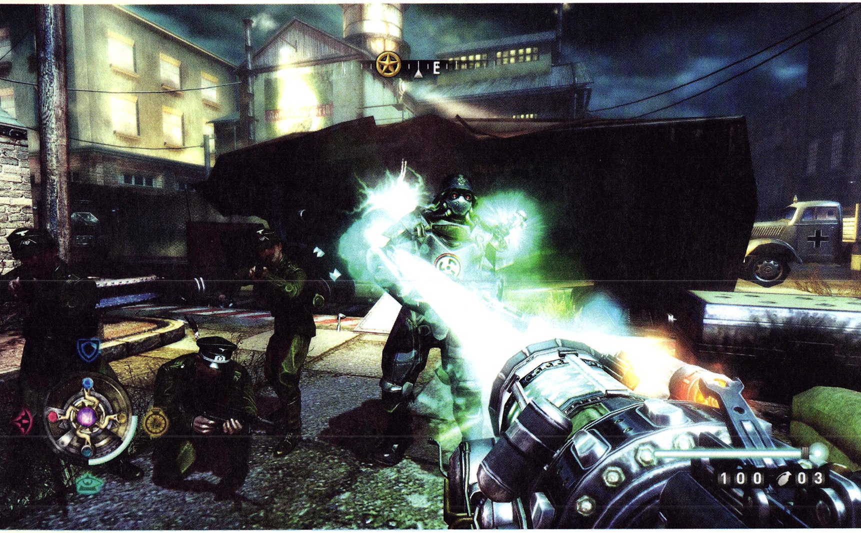
Roger has just one cherished item that warrants accompanying him to the everafter, but he'd prefer his Taylor Koa acoustic guitar be passed on to one of his kids or a friend instead. Actually, this is exactly why he wants a Viking funeral: to divest himself of the material world. But feel free to bring along some weiners and marshmallows for roasting if you come to see him off.

NOW PLAYING: *Heroes Over Europe, Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising, LBP*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

For Scott, his most prized possessions are obvious: his guitars. At two electrics, two acoustics, and one bass, it's a relatively modest collection, but it'd be more than enough to start an awesome undead Rock 'n' Roll ensemble once the zombie apocalypse begins (though he would need to locate a reanimated drummer). Seriously, how sweet would a zombie rock band be?

NOW PLAYING: *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2, The Beatles: Rock Band, Fat Princess*



PS3 | R

The armored Veil Heavy Troopers are easy to take down if you target their weak spots—or just blast them with their own Particle Cannons.

Wolfenstein

Weird War II

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Raven Software

Nazi sorcerers can also wield Veil powers.

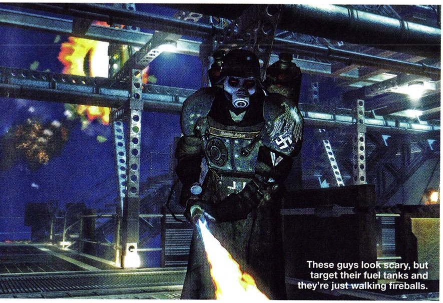
The sorcerors cast shield spells to aid fellow Nazis.

Now that World War II shooters have become synonymous with gritty realism and historical accuracy, it's nice to be reminded of how the genre began: crazy, ultraviolent, and just a little bit silly. And it's only fitting that the reminder comes from *Wolfenstein,* the series that started it all.

Following the continued exploits of Allied superspy William "B.J." Blazkowicz, *Wolfenstein* picks up more or less where 2001's *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* left off. Having just foiled a Nazi plan to resurrect a Teutonic warlord, B.J. is ordered right back into action to disrupt Nazi operations in the German town of Isenstadt. Once there, he discovers a bizarre plot to tap into a parallel dimension and harness an energy source called The Black Sun, which—thanks to an ancient medallion B.J. steals from a Nazi dig site—he can use to gain temporary superpowers.

Slightly insane story aside, *Wolfenstein's* action is fairly uncomplicated (but still badass) run-and-gun; B.J. can absorb lots of punishment and ammo is plentiful, so it's perfectly acceptable (at least at first) to use meathead tactics like spraying enemies with bullets while charging them head-on. There are a few unique twists though, and the biggest is The Veil, a greenish pocket dimension between ours and The Black Sun's that can be freely accessed once B.J. has the medallion. Working like enhanced night vision, The Veil makes it easier to spot enemies, highlights weak points and hidden objects, and reveals Geists, floating insectoid creatures that can explode if shot (preferably next to enemies). Slipping into The Veil is incredibly useful, to the point that you'll probably spend more time there than in the more colorful "normal" world—hope green's your favorite color though.

Entering The Veil also gives B.J. access to Black Sun powers, which can slow time, create a temporary shield, or greatly increase the power



These guys look scary, but target their fuel tanks and they're just walking fireballs.

of his weapons. Buying crystals from the game's black marketers can upgrade these powers, giving B.J. the ability to dodge bullets, reflect attacks, and shoot through enemy cover. Those same black marketers also sell a wide assortment of upgrades to boost the range, accuracy, and firepower for B.J.'s guns, all of which become increasingly handy as your enemies get smarter, tougher, and better equipped.

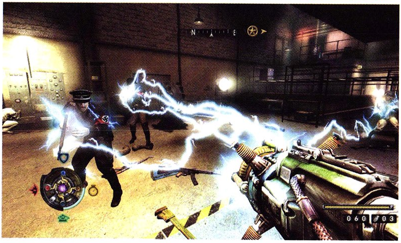
Another big twist is that, unlike previous games in the series, *Wolfenstein* doesn't follow a strict level-to-level progression. Instead, you're able to more or less freely explore the town of Isenstadt, which acts as a hub between levels. Here, you'll gun down randomly spawning squads of Nazis while you seek out black marketers, Golden Dawn sorcerers, and Kreisau Circle resistance fighters, all of whom want to chat you up, give you missions—including optional side missions that feel almost as fleshed out as the "real" ones—and help you boot the Nazis out of Isenstadt.

Of course, all of this is on top of everything else fans have come to expect from *Wolfenstein* over the years: creepy Nazi magic, creepier mutant abominations, enemy-vaporizing superguns, catsuit-wearing female elite soldiers, hulking enemies in steel power armor, giant boss monsters, and conspicuous red barrels placed everywhere for no reason other than to explode when shot. It's a buffet of ridiculous sci-fi tropes and comic-book Nazi plots shoehorned into an excellent first-person shooter, and it comes together as a relentlessly fun, darkly silly experience. It's no *Call of Duty,* true, but then *CoD* doesn't let you tear apart giant monsters with machine gun turrets or battle Nazis in a zeppelin, does it?

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★

▼ The Tesla Gun: For when you absolutely, positively have to kill every Nazi in the room.

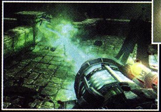


Join the Resistance

Like any self-respecting shooter, *Wolfenstein* boasts a robust, 12-player multiplayer mode that features eight maps, three player classes, a ranking system, and plenty of unlockable guns and perks to give dedicated players an edge. Aside from standard team deathmatches, the Objective mode hurls medics, engineers (who can plant bombs or defenses), and soldiers (who are tougher than the other two) into multilayered missions in which one side has to overcome the other's defenses, one layer at a time. Once a defensive layer is breached, a new, hazard-filled area of the map opens up, intensifying the action and keeping things interesting for both sides.

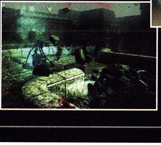
The big guns

Wolfenstein wouldn't be *Wolfenstein* without bizarre, experimental Nazi weapons with which to wreak havoc. Aside from standard 1940s firearms, here's what you'll get to play around with:



Particle Cannon: Ever wonder what the Ghostbusters' proton beams could do if shot at a human body? The Particle Cannon attempts to answer that question with a twisting stream of pure, Nazi-vaporizing energy.

Tesla Gun: The Tesla Gun blasts arcs of lightning that can electrocute multiple foes at once. The DualShock 3 controller-enabled shudder marks each enemy death and adds an extra touch of creepiness.

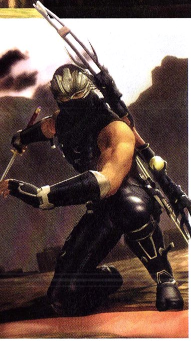


Leichenfaust 44: Overkill in gun form, the Leichenfaust hurls balls of pure Black Sun energy, which disintegrate enemies while causing them—and any nearby objects—to levitate briefly.

Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2

A Cut Above

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Tecmo **DEVELOPER:** Team Ninja



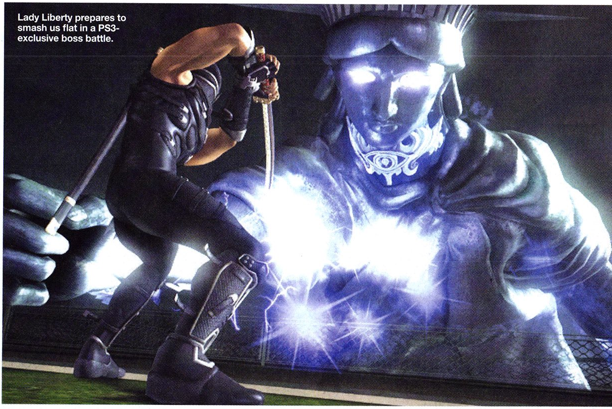
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 is all about action. The plot is thin and the levels are relatively ugly and sterile compared to more bombastic action games like *Devil May Cry* and *God of War,* but at its heart, there's a silky-smooth combat system that makes you feel like an absolute god…once you come to grips with it. Bashing buttons and learning the basics will get you through the first few levels on Acolyte (Easy), but it isn't until you look at the moves list in the inventory screen that you realise how many combos are at your disposal…*per weapon*. Rather than being intimidating, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* encourages you to play around with each blade, learning its intricacies. And your reward? Incredible, beautifully animated combos.

Combined with the steep difficulty curve, the devastating moves and well-designed weaponry makes every kill—from the lowliest enemy ninja to the most terrifying demon—feel like a small personal victory. When you see Ryu Hayabusa (your playable character through the majority of the story) flick a ninja above his head with his Eclipse Scythe before neatly chopping him in half—the camera zooming in for a closer inspection of the kill, a meaty slicing sound accompanying each "obliteration" move—it's a seriously satisfying moment.

Martial hearts

But it's also something you have to earn. Each fight with every individual enemy is a duel in itself. Learning to block, counter, and time your attacks (and even knowing which weapon will be most effective) is difficult enough in a one-on-one brawler, but it reaches a whole new height of challenge when you're battling seven or eight different opponents at once. This unforgiving level of difficulty can at times be the game's undoing. We lost count of the number of times we had to hit "Continue" after being felled by a particularly hard boss, and we're not proud of the language we used on those all-too-common occasions when we were wiped out with a Heal and Save statue in sight, but tragically out of reach.

For some, this game will simply be too tough, and no amount of busty female ninja babes or larger than life instruments of death will convince less hardy players to push beyond



Lady Liberty prepares to smash us flat in a PS3-exclusive boss battle.

Guide to Dismemberment

To pull off the most satisfying kills, you'll need to master these moves…

OBLITERATION TECHNIQUE When an enemy has lost a limb, hit the Triangle button and Ryu will finish him off by lopping off the rest with a series of slashes. Ouch.

ULTIMATE TECHNIQUE Hold down Triangle and you'll absorb essence from fallen enemies. Let go and you'll unleash an unblockable flurry of blows.

NINPO If things start to go wrong for you in a big way hitting Triangle and Circle will activate your Ninpo, which is a magic attack that clears the area of foes.

the third or fourth level. And when regular play requires nerves of steel, every sloppy section or gameplay defect is twice as noticeable. The camera, which many complained about in *Sigma 2's* Xbox 360 predecessor *Ninja Gaiden 2* is still a little unruly, although it is noticeably better and never a significant annoyance.

A far greater problem is some of the content that has been added to the Story mode. The much-touted PS3-exclusive boss fight against the Statue of Liberty is a massive letdown because it feels so obscure and unfair next to the game's other, better-thought-out boss battles. Defeating it is a grind, and there's no obvious way to finish it off—we have no idea how we managed it. Fortunately, the PS3-exclusive bonus characters: Rachel, Ayane, and Momiji, each a jiggly ninja babe with her own respective levels, are implemented with skill and subtlety. All three feel sufficiently distinct—for instance, Momiji wields a huge pole-arm, but is slower, while Ayane is lightning fast and dissects opponents with dual short swords—and their stages are perfectly suited to the moves and tools at their disposal.

Slice of Heaven

Another worthwhile addition is the "Team Missions" co-op mode. These separate "arena" style battles let you play online co-op using any combination of characters and weapons (once you've unlocked them in the main game), and essentially take all the great combat and enemies from the main campaign, remove the hokey plot, and let you experiment with all the cool weapons and moves you've unlocked. Together, you and your partner can combine Ninpo spells (magic) to create awesome screen-filling blasts, revive each other, and compete for a share of the overall Karma (points).

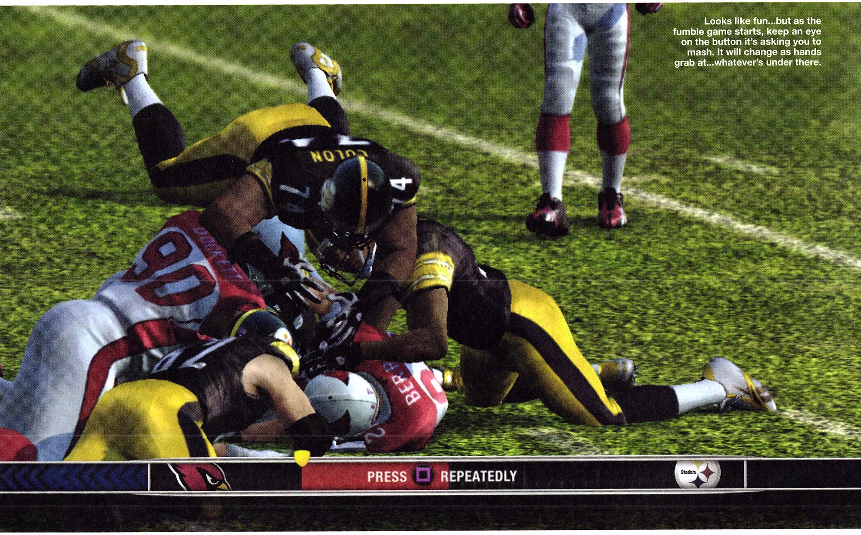
It seems like a fair swap for the Tests of Valor, which appeared as mid-game arena battles in the 360 version but are absent from *Sigma 2.* That's a change we can understand. However, a few of the other tweaks are more puzzling. The well-documented toning down of blood, which has been mostly replaced by puffs of purple smoke, seems unnecessary. There's still enough decapitation, dismembering, and skewering in this version to keep the game rated Mature, so it seems odd that Team Ninja didn't just go all the way and leave the blood spurting liberally out of every wound.

Similarly, we're not sure why the Blacksmith options have been changed. In the original *NG2,* you could level-up items with hard cash (Karma), but now you're granted just one level per shop and you're not allowed to max out any weapon until the second half of the game. True, it encourages you to experiment with different blades—leading to a richer overall gaming experience—but it seems like an unnecessary theft of player discretion and freedom.

Nonetheless, *Sigma 2* is arguably the purest, most hardcore hack-and-slash fighting game on PS3. If you're looking for a rich game world or a plot that actually explains how you can be biking down a mountainside one minute and fighting a giant flaming armadillo the next, you might want to look elsewhere. But if you want to feel like a badass ninja, have a great time slicing stuff up, and don't mind a challenge, this is an essential purchase.

Andy Hartup

★★★★½



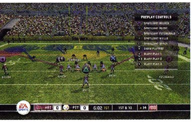
Looks like fun...but as the fumble game starts, keep an eye on the button it's asking you to mash. It will change as hands grab at...whatever's under there.

PS3 | R

Madden NFL 10

Massively multiplayer Madden

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon



Pre-play options let you put the camera on a specific player, like the Arizona Cardinals' touchdown machine, Larry Fitzgerald. This focus on star players extends to the Trophies, many of which require you to perform specific tasks with the game's biggest stars.

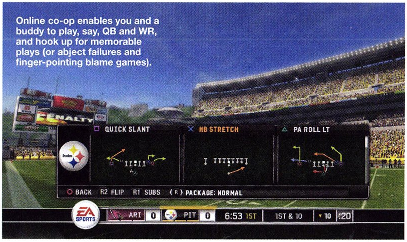
Ready to play *Madden* on your PC, Mac, and iPhone, as well as your PS3? You'd better be. Responding to years of fan requests, developer EA Tiburon is finally rolling out an online franchise mode. This new mode enables you to manage rosters, make and assess trades, and perform pretty much your entire managerial role (outside of actually playing the game) through the servers of publisher EA Sports—directly from a web browser or iPhone app.

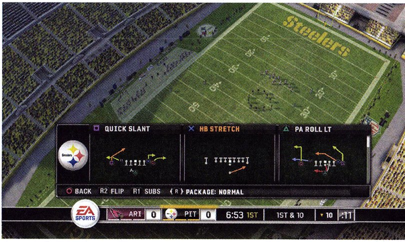
The upshot is that *Madden NFL 10* can satisfy the legion of fans wanting to play commissioner, setting their own parameters, number of teams, trade restrictions, salary caps, and more, all following the regular NFL season schedule (if you so choose). Then, up to 32 players can join your league, taking the current team rosters or engaging in full fantasy drafts, making trade decisions, and calling plays from the playbook you choose.

The potential is staggering in a variety of ways. It creates 32-team custom leagues in a real, persistent environment, and it provides EA another method of micro-fleecing customers with different add-on packs and functionality (such as one that allows a star to be saved from retirement for one more year, preying on your hope to keep a favorite player on your roster). An Elite Status option provides "special" functions like VIP lobbies and leaderboards for those players ready to plunk down extra bucks for the red carpet treatment.

Broadcast quality

Straight out of the box, *Madden NFL 10* showcases the kind of upgrades we expect year on year. The "Extra Point" TV show brings in NFL Network hosts to ham it up through stilted, superficial, and regurgitated recaps of your successes and failures. New camera shots of the sidelines reveal coaches yelling at receivers who drop a pass or linemen who miss


Online co-op enables you and a buddy to play, say, QB and WR, and hook up for memorable plays (or abject failures and finger-pointing blame games).



▲ Take in a blimp's-eye-view of the stadium before selecting your Play Action Pass play (incredibly effective on lower difficulty settings if you've established a running game).

a tackle. You might even spot an Air Force fly-over. Each of these additions adds broadcast-style credibility to the overall visuals, but what really matters to most players is the action and visual representation on the field.

With that in mind, the "Pro-tak" animation technology reshapes the impact of hundreds of pounds of sweaty man-flesh colliding at high speed in play-ending pile-ups. Using the Right-analog stick, you can now change your tackle direction if it seems a runner is slipping through (and on offense, attempt to wriggle past these tackles), and create massive rucks as extra defenders join in. If the ball carrier fumbles, it can trigger a new quick-time button-mashing sequence in which you hammer away on whatever buttons are highlighted, hopefully faster than your opponent, to recover or regain that muffed egg. Fortunately this doesn't crop up during every fumble, but it adds a competitive element to those massive scrums.

It definitely feels like the pounding that players' bodies take in the real games has found weight on the virtual gridiron. From the subtle shudder of the screen after a perfectly timed and executed hit to the injuries that require you to make a call on whether a key player should sit out or continue playing, risking further damage, the message comes across: these guys hit each other hard. It does seem like runners can shake off tackles (particularly in the open field) more easily than in the past, and timing tackles with the right analog stick requires a little more precision. Even *Madden* veterans may want to head to the training ground to acclimate themselves to the new control nuances.

Add a dash of (John) Madden

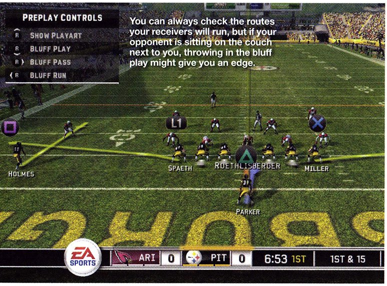
All in, this year's *Madden* displays a few more quirks than last year's very well constructed anniversary edition. On the commentary side, with Madden leaving the TV booth, his input here is decidedly curtailed. Madden's own contextual play-calling comments often run over Cris Collinsworth's color spiel, making it difficult to hear either. Even the context of Madden's advice is often wonky, particularly in key third-down play calls during which we quickly stopped trusting his suggestions.

Though it might sound like a cop-out, the on-field action really does tighten up each year. However, *Madden NFL 10* will gain all its newest plaudits for the implementation of the online franchises. Admirably, the developers have aimed to provide as much flexibility to each league's commissioner (and by extension, each player in the community) to tailor their particular league however they see fit. That's the evolving online world of pro football simulation; it's heading towards a persistent setup where football will be available 12 months of the year, on any platform you wish to play it.

Rob Smith

★★★★

> "All in, this year's *Madden* displays a few more quirks than last year's very well constructed anniversary edition."


You can always check the routes your receivers will run, but if your opponent is sitting on the couch next to you, throwing in the bluff play might give you an edge.

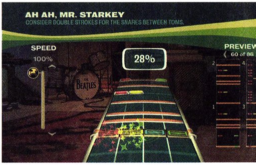
L1
ROETHLISBERGER
ARI 0
PIT 0
6:07 1ST
2ND & 4
16
:05

▼ Sitting in the pocket now comes into play for quarterbacks. You'll feel the controller rumble as the pocket collapses, letting you know to get the ball out of your hands *quickly!*

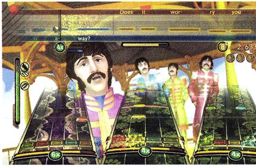
The Beatles: Rock Band

What would you think if I sang out of tune?

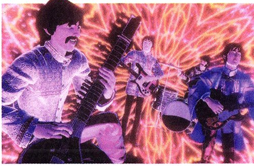
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 (disc only); $249.99 (disc, drums, mic and stand, one guitar) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: MTV Games DEVELOPER: Harmonix



The drum and vocal trainers are helpful, but pulling off Expert beats and harmonies requires real skill.



Unlike the other *Rock Band* games, there's no penalty for restarting a song.



This is easily the most visually ambitious of all the one-band games out there. It's gorgeous!

Band-specific music games must toe a very fine line: keep fans of the band happy while simultaneously creating an experience that appeals to everyone. *The Beatles: Rock Band* accomplishes the first half of that dual goal brilliantly, offering an incredibly slick, polished package that features an abundance of Beatles content and a loving attention to detail. Fans of the Fab Four will surely be thrilled—especially if they're new to rhythm games—but unfortunately, more experienced rockers may find the game's offerings a bit thin.

Take the Story mode, for example. You'll work your way through a linear series of venues—each of which is based upon a famous Beatles concert—earning stars to unlock photographs while enjoying cutscenes, audio clips, and stylized collages along the way. The bonus content (especially the treasure trove of six special "prizes" you eventually unlock) is genuinely fascinating, not just to Beatles fans, but to anyone who cares about music.

However, the structure is straightforward to a fault. You unlock photos by completing a song, earning five stars on a song, completing a chapter, and beating the Chapter Challenges...or in other words, for beating a song, beating a song well, beating several songs, or beating several songs in a row. The lack of variety speaks for itself, though the Chapter Challenges are particularly disappointing—they literally force you to replay the last five or six songs you just beat.

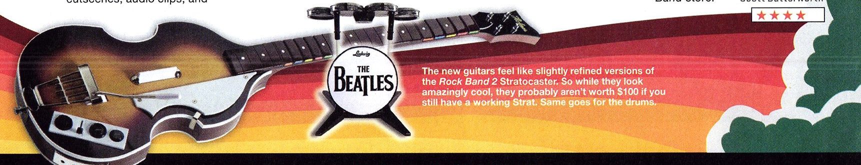
Without *Rock Band's* familiar, immersive career extras—like character customization, video shoots, and vehicles, silly as they may be—the story feels sterile and empty, especially since you can blow through it in a single weekend. Plus, you have no real involvement or interaction with the band. The game adopts a look-but-don't-touch sort of attitude, and while the reverence is understandable, it's not entirely enjoyable.

Still, you should never underestimate the power of The Beatles. Their music works perfectly in the context of a rhythm game: nearly every track of every song is fun to play, and the variety of the material within the Beatles' catalog is stunning. Plus, developer Harmonix, as always, created some top notch note tracks to complement the music. The difficulty may have been toned down a bit to accommodate the casual crowd, but seriously, who cares? The same old scrolling-note gameplay is as fun as ever, and the newly added option to sing vocal harmonies introduces a nice Beatles-specific touch.

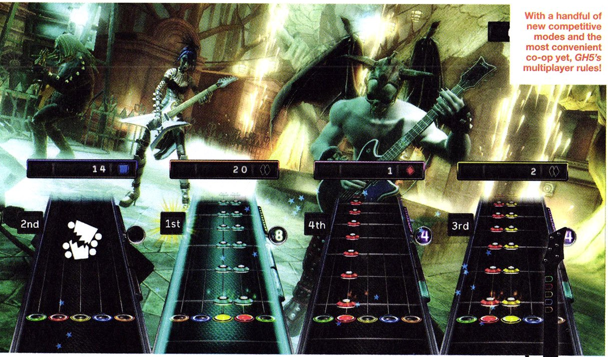
So the game may not be perfect but the Beatles' music pretty much is, and while 45 tracks definitely feels a bit sparse, it's cheaper to pick up *The Beatles: Rock Band* than it would be to buy 45 songs of *Rock Band* DLC...and they don't sell Beatles songs in the *Rock Band* store.

Scott Butterworth

★★★★



The new guitars feel like slightly refined versions of the *Rock Band 2* Stratocaster. So while they look amazingly cool, they probably aren't worth $100 if you still have a working Strat. Same goes for the drums.



With a handful of new competitive modes and the most convenient co-op yet, *GH5's* multiplayer rules!

Better animations and deeper customization make this the best-looking *GH* yet.

Guitar Hero 5

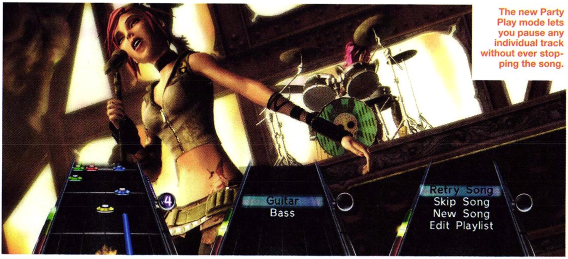
Finally ready to rock

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 (disc only); $99.99 (guitar, disc) **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** Neversoft

Despite the fact that last year's *Guitar Hero: World Tour* added bass, drums, and vocals to the rhythm-action franchise's repertoire, the game somehow felt incomplete. The gameplay exceeded expectations, but other aspects of the experience were roughly executed at best. So in many ways, *Guitar Hero 5* feels like the game *World Tour* should have been—not only because it introduces a handful of new ideas, but because it generally feels more fully-realized thanks to the simple but essential improvements made to nearly every area of the game.

Case in point: the Career mode. Much like the earlier days of the franchise, you'll play through a linear series of venues—each of which lets you choose from a handful of songs—earning stars with each performance and unlocking new venues. The process feels about as typical as it sounds, but it helps that you're no longer forced to stick to a single instrument or play preset trios of songs or endure gratuitous celebrity cameos and boss battles, as you did in the last game. Compared to that rigid grind, the new simplicity of maintaining a single career, progressing forward with your band one song at a time, is refreshingly straightforward and agreeable.

The all-new Bonus Challenges also make harvesting stars a bit more interesting. Every song has an optional skill challenge—such as nailing a certain number of hammer-ons—that can potentially earn you two additional stars. Not all are brilliant, but as optional endeavors, they add real variety and value to the game.



The new Party Play mode lets you pause any individual track without ever stopping the song.

If the added pressure to perform challenges is too stressful, you can always take refuge in Party Play, the mode that spawned the "rock any way you want" tagline. Party Play allows anyone to jump in or drop out mid-song or change their instrument or difficulty without ever stopping the song (and it works brilliantly). But strangely, this mode is the *only* place where these options apply. Even in Quickplay, you still have to choose your difficulty at the band screen *before* you ever see the songs. Fortunately, the menu system (and the presentation overall) is far cleaner and more convenient to utilize this time around.

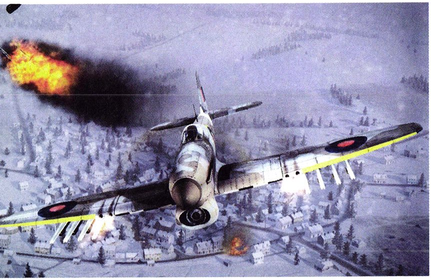
And perhaps most importantly, both the musical material and corresponding note tracks easily top last year's offerings. In a few instances, the developers selected the right band but not the best song (Weezer? Definitely. "Why Bother?" Uh, sure.) and made a few strange choices when scaling down the difficulty of the note charts (on everything but Expert, the opening bass line to "Under Pressure" is missing a very key note, for example), but the fact that you can import your old *World Tour* DLC should help to compensate for these minor lapses.

Guitar Hero 5 still emphasizes challenge over fun, but if that's the beat you march to, this may well be your new favorite game.

Scott Butterworth

★★★★½

Simulation fans will bristle at the turbo-like Warspeed mode, but Arcade fans will revel in the injection of speed and the reduction of between-combat downtime.



When it comes to visual eye candy, *Heroes Over Europe* delivers with highly detailed plane models and gorgeous flame and explosion effects.

PS3 | R

PSP | R

Heroes Over Europe

All the thrills without requiring the skills

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Transmission Games

Cool planes. Awesome explosions. Non-stop action. The question is this: is that all you want from an air combat game? For the true flight-sim gamer, the answer is a simple and direct "No." But for arcade aces who prefer to dispense with the complexities of airborne dueling in favor of the cheap kill, *Heroes Over Europe* has landed.

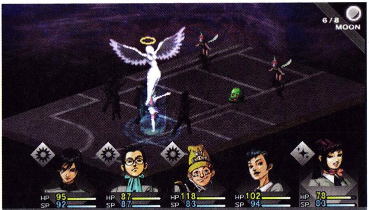
Like the beautifully detailed warbirds that populate it, *Heroes* comes armed with frontline graphics. Zeroing in on an enemy plane and watching it disintegrate from gunfire will leave war-geeks salivating. And special accolades for the smoke, flame, and explosion effects that make us feel all happy and tingly—like watching fireworks on a summer's night.

But in the cockpit, the game plays more like a shooter than a flight sim. There's an Ace Kill function that works like a Sniper mode in which you zoom in for a one-shot kill—cool effect, but hardly realistic. And the turbo-like Warspeed mode is handy for quickly getting out of an enemy's cross hairs but requires no skill and cheapens the experience.

Even with its lack of depth and substance, nobody's going to complain about taking *Heroes* up for some quick shoot-'em-up action. But it's just not satisfying enough to be worthy of a combat commendation for serious flight combat fans.

Roger Burchill

★★★½



Each Persona levels up independently and has its own set of magic spells, so the more you summon it the more powerful and varied its abilities will become.

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona

A true form revealed

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Atlus

First released on the original PlayStation, *Persona* focuses on a group of high school students who learn that they suddenly have the ability to summon magic entities called Personas. At the same moment, their once peaceful town suddenly becomes a dark, hellish place infested with dangerous demons. Coincidence? Yeah, right.

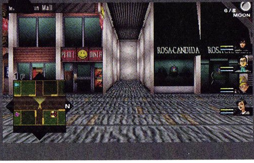
Luckily, you and your friends are well equipped to fight back, with an arsenal of attack options in turn-based grid battles. Not only can each party member wield two weapons (one melee item and one gun), but each person can also equip multiple Personas, each of which has a range of spells. Sure, the first-person dungeons do become tedious, with high enemy encounter rates and confusing floor plans, but the option to avoid battles by "negotiating" with demons (essentially taking a gamble) helps ease the fatigue.

A decade's too long for a game as good as *Persona* to suffer from shoddy localization. And publisher Atlus agrees. So it's fixing the nonsensical translations and cringe-worthy character changes with a PSP remake that's closer to the Japanese original.

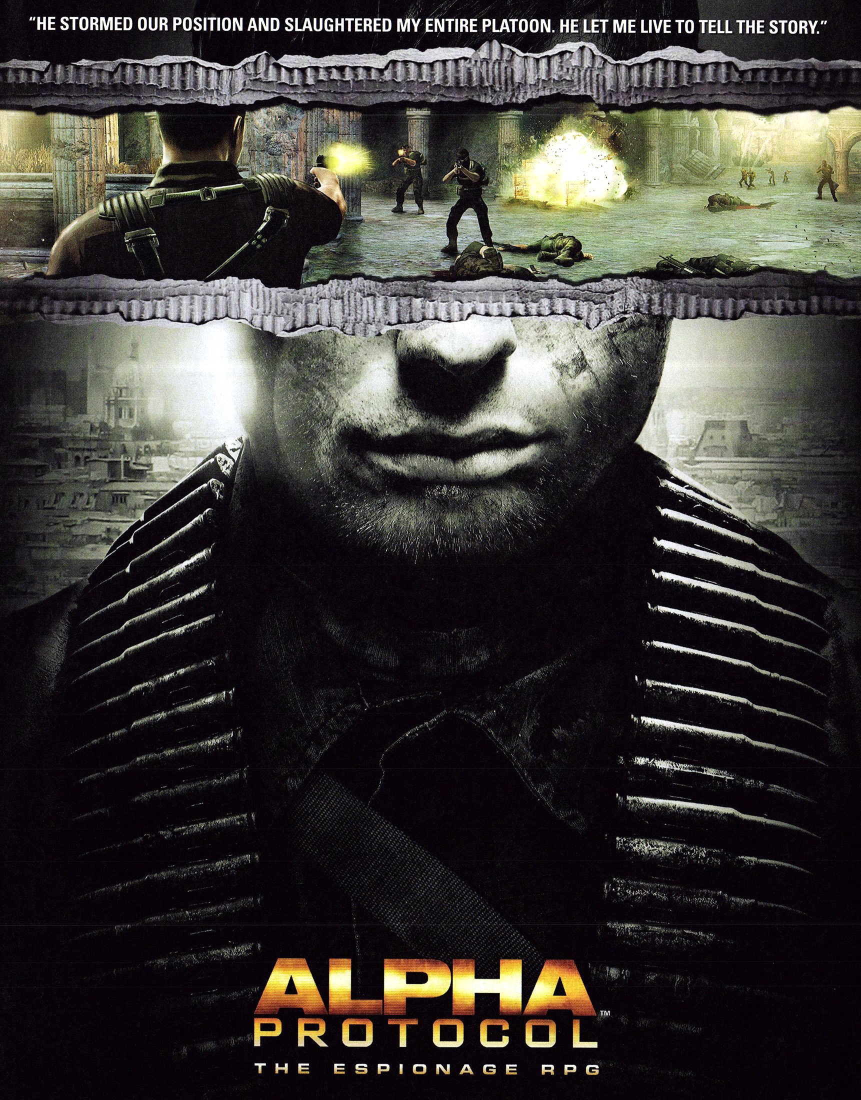
While it shows its age at times, *Persona* more than deserves the respectable treatment it's finally been given. The only people who won't rejoice at this release are those selling overpriced copies of the original *Revelations: Persona* on eBay.

Carolyn Gudmundson

★★★★



In the labyrinthine dungeons, your view switches to a first-person perspective.


"HE STORMED OUR POSITION AND SLAUGHTERED MY ENTIRE PLATOON. HE LET ME LIVE TO TELL THE STORY."
ALPHA PROTOCOL™
THE ESPIONAGE RPG

Mana Khemia 2: Fall of Alchemy

Fair, but familiar

PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS DEVELOPER: Gust

This RPG's setup is way too familiar (even if you haven't played the first *Mana Khemia*): you're a mage enrolled in a magical boarding school. You tread through term after term completing supernatural assignments and stirring up drama—been there, done that.

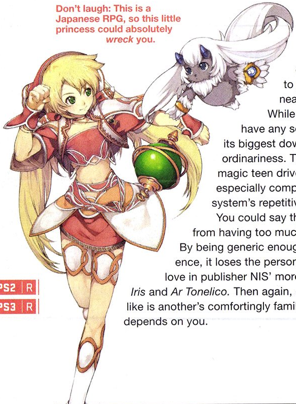
In *Fall of Alchemy,* battles are straightforward turn-based fare in which your goal is to chain as many hits as you can to activate a special "unite" mode that speeds up your movement for a decisive victory. Inactive party members can be swapped in at strategic moments, chaining quick combos in the process, or a resting character can swoop in to guard someone who's near death.

While *Fall of Alchemy* doesn't have any serious technical flaws, its biggest downfall is its complete ordinariness. The story is your typical magic teen drivel, the characters aren't especially compelling, and the battle system's repetitive.

You could say that this series suffers from having too much mass anime appeal. By being generic enough to attract a wide audience, it loses the personality and sass that we love in publisher NIS' more niche titles, like *Atelier Iris* and *Ar Tonelico*. Then again, one person's stale lookalike is another's comfortingly familiar fun, so ultimately it depends on you.

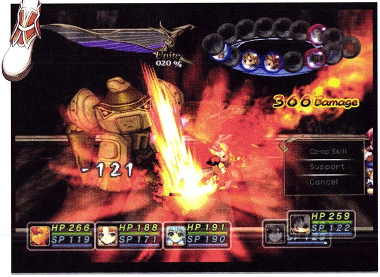
Carolyn Gudmundson

★★★

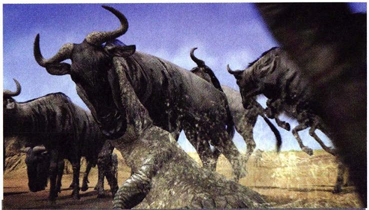


Don't laugh: This is a Japanese RPG, so this little princess could absolutely *wreck* you.

PS2 | R
PS3 | R



We loved the lack of random battles in dungeons—visible enemies wander around everywhere, and you can almost always avoid them if you're sneaky.



For the most part, you wander freely through the terrain, snapping photos for assignments. But every now and again, you unlock a "Big Game Hunt," which activates a more exciting scripted event.

Afrika

Slooooow...yet satisfying

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Natsume DEVELOPER: Rhino Studios

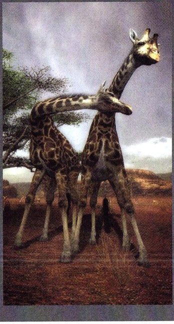
It's been five minutes since we've twitched a muscle. We're controlling a freelance nature photographer standing ankle-deep in water at the Polepole Falls in Choroa Gorge, holding a camera to our face. Three African Elephants lounge less than 15 yards away. Behind them, a waterfall roars—you'd think the din would drown out any noise we make, but nope, even the zip of a camera focusing alerts them to our presence. That's why we've got the focus lock on, and we're waiting...waiting for them to come to us, so we can snap the perfect close-up of elephants playing in water.

Afrika isn't your typical game. With its in-depth log of animal facts and camera parts, it's educational and realistic. With its accurate rendering of African terrain and wildlife, it's beautiful and soothing. It's also slow. You have to wait forever to line up a good shot—the giraffes and hippos and ostriches always seem to display their unusual behavior patterns while facing away from you—and the load times are awful, but it's worth it. If you don't run screaming from the idea of exploring, relaxing, and achieving photography goals through patience and hard work, you'll enjoy *Afrika.* And there's nothing like the satisfaction of seeing "Elephants Playing in Water" on the cover of *National Geographic* magazine, even if it's just in a game.

Teresa Dun

★★★½

To get a vertical shot, you have to turn your controller to its side. Then, play around with your focus to achieve the perfect blur effect.

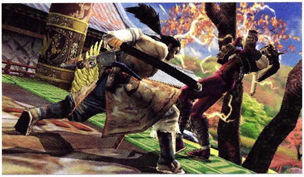


Getting an up-close shot of a lion (like this) takes patience.

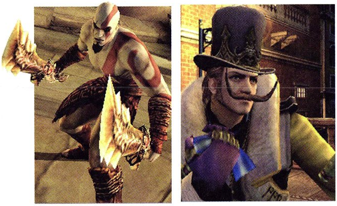
"HE WENT INSIDE UNDETECTED, RESCUED ME, AND THEN HE WAS GONE."

ALPHA™ PROTOCOL

THE ESPIONAGE RPG



Ad hoc PSP-to-PSP battles on the go are the main reason to pick up *Broken Destiny* if you already own *Soulcalibur IV*.



The two special characters included in *Broken Destiny* are the infamous Kratos from *God of War* and the brand new Dampierre, who serves as comic relief.

Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny

The finely tuned fighter works well on handheld

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Project Soul

Success in *Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny* requires a sharp weapon and a sharp mind. Instead of focusing on impossible combos, the fighting here is about reacting to opponents' moves with swift counters or carefully selected flurries of attacks. It's tactical; as much an intellectual battle as it is a slugfest, and this plays to the PSP's strengths.

The new Gauntlet mode indicates that *Broken Destiny* is targeted toward newcomers. It's basically a rigorous training session that reduces the ins and outs of combat to an increasingly repetitive series of two-second mini-games. The non-canon plot also seems to be aimed directly at people who don't take the series too seriously. It's entertainingly worded, even going so far as to drop the odd double entendre. However, this easy entry into the world of *Soulcalibur* comes at a price. There are no mission modes to match the adventure or weapon master sections, and you never feel as if there's anything to really sink your teeth into. Potentially more disappointing is the lack of any online play—you have to be in the same room to play against a human opponent. That's weak.

Happily, when it comes to the intricacies of gameplay, little introduced in *Soulcalibur IV* is lost, from the crowd-pleasing critical finishers to the colorful visuals. Die-hard fans hoping for something new will inevitably be disappointed, but even they can't fail to be impressed at just how complete and convincing a handheld title this is.

Rory Smith

★★★★

PSP | **R**

Fate/Unlimited Codes

The greatest pr0n-inspired (don't tell!) fighting game ever

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Eighting

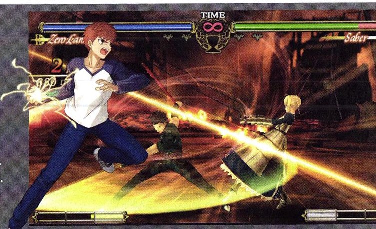
Fate/Unlimited Codes is an oddity. It's a semi-3D fighting game that was spun off from a series of erotic Japanese PC games, sanitized, and then presented to American PSP gamers exclusively over PSN. We'd forgive you for ignoring it, but if you did, you'd miss out on one of the PSP's more awesome fighters.

Telling a convoluted story about sorcerers fighting a secret war with summoned proxy warriors, *Fate* features a deceptively simple four-button fighting system and a lengthy roster of easy-to-execute special moves. But like any good fighter, it's hiding layers of complexity just beneath the surface, and the intrepid player can try wrestling with its monstrously complicated combos, chained specials, and "magic burst" attacks. Just be sure to raise the difficulty above Normal if you want a half-decent challenge from your opponents.

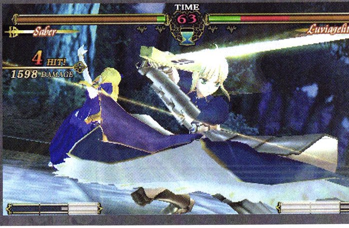
Hardcore considerations aside, *Fate's* fast action and dramatic-looking super attacks are a lot of bouncy, pummel-y fun (not surprising, considering developer Eighting is behind the upcoming *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom)*. It's also beautiful by PSP standards and packs in enough unlockable extras and secondary modes—like the objective-based, sometimes-grueling Mission mode—to keep it interesting even after you've fully explored its bizarre story. Adding Infrastructure play would have improved it (it only supports two-player ad hoc), but there's enough here to keep fighting fans happy.

Mikel Reparaz

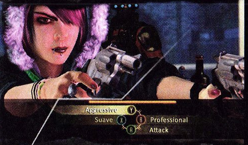
★★★★



The game may be inspired by porn, but there's nothing unsavory or even racy about this fighting game.

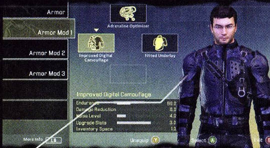


"EVERY EVENT STARTED WITH *THEIR* CHOICES. THEY ENDED WITH MINE."

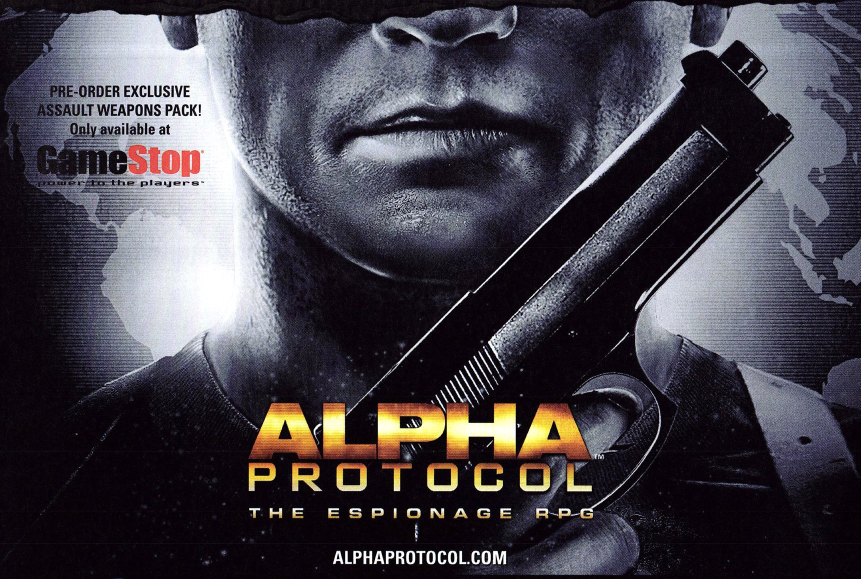

Aggressive
Suave
Professional
Attack

DECIDE HOW THE STORY PLAYS OUT BASED ON THE CHOICES THAT YOU MAKE.

EMPLOY METHODS OF STEALTH, TRICKERY, HUMOR, TECHNICAL APTITUDE, SABOTAGE, FIREPOWER, AND MANY MORE.


Armor
Armor Mod 1
Armor Mod 2
Armor Mod 3
Adrenaline Optimizer
Improved Digital Camouflage
Fitted Underlay
Improved Digital Camouflage
Endurance
Damage Reduction
Noise Level
Upgrade Slots
Inventory Space
More Info
Unequip
Select

COMMAND SKILLS LIKE CLOSE-COMBAT TECHNIQUES, LETHAL WEAPONS MASTERY, & THE USE OF INGENIOUS SPY GADGETS.



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M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Sexual Content
Strong Language

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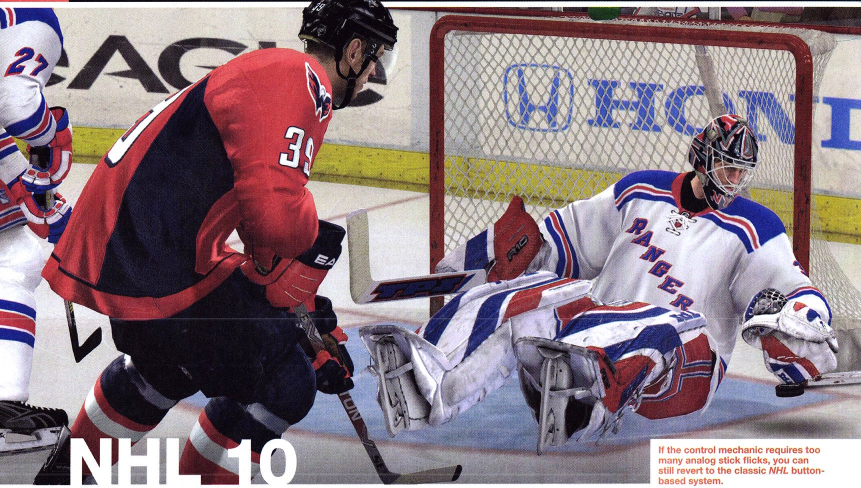


If the control mechanic requires too many analog stick flicks, you can still revert to the classic *NHL* button-based system.

NHL 10

A hooker and a slasher walk onto a hockey rink...

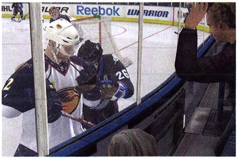
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

PS3 | R

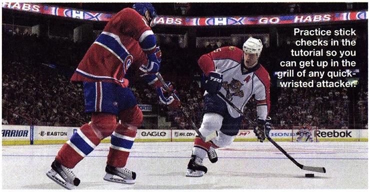
NHL 10 is a phenomenal hockey game. It's fluid, deep, packed with startling animations and buzzer-beater action. But this series was great last year, too. What's new for 2010? Attitude. This year, the game bought a leather jacket, learned to sneer, and started hanging out with the kids from the rough side of town.

Slashing and hooking are clearly criminal offenses—you can tell by their very names. Get caught performing either of them on the hockey rink, and you risk not only the penalty box, but a beat down from vengeful opponents. After all, fighting is part of hockey, like it or not, and *NHL 10* embraces this pugilistic mentality with a new brawling mechanic. When the gloves come off, the camera swoops down to give you a first-person view of your character performing free four-knuckle dentistry on your opponent's face.

The thing is, the punches don't really *do* much—the crowd gets louder and your team gets a little faster, but you're better off just avoiding fights and thereby staying out of the penalty box. Similarly, the new method of pinning an opponent against the boards (or protecting the puck if you're the one pinned) is realistic, but there's a reason this tactic has taken more than 15 years to make it into the game: it's just not that big of a deal. And when the button that you need to hold to induce a press on the boards (Triangle) is the same one you tap to start a fight, trouble brews way too easily.



When pinned to the glass, fans crowd around the players, pounding on the glass. Neat, but a purely superficial addition.



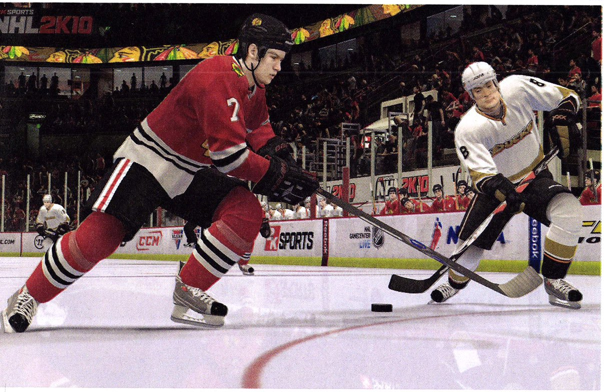
Practice stick checks in the tutorial so you can get up in the grill of any quick-wristed attacker.

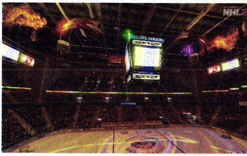
A few games in, we stopped trying to start fights or pin players to the boards. The on-ice control still made precision a little tricky—the game rewards skill and strategy with dunks into space and passes that can go astray—but overall, our penalties decreased and our gameplay success improved.

The "Be a Pro" career mode is incredibly enticing. It's been refined over the last year to provide a gentler progression curve, from third, to second, to first line in the minors before waiting for the call to the NHL franchise of your choice, upgrading your player and equipment all along over seasons of play. And that's what you should focus on: the depth of hockey content, the persistent online leagues, the simple playoff formula to challenge friends, and the spectacular visuals. Leave the fighting to *Fight Night Round 4*.

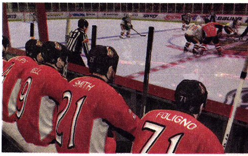
Rob Smith

★★★★½





Realistic arenas recreate everything except the possibility that a bashed-out tooth will land in your $11 cup of beer.



Line shifts are critical in hockey. If you don't know what that means, this might not be your kind of game.

NHL 2K10

Checking into the rivalry

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

Hockey connoisseurs, which 2010 vintage would you prefer: a refined, stylish number with a lingering finish that makes you work to appreciate its complexities *(NHL 10)* or a more fruit-forward, in-your-face varietal that, while you won't spit it out, could have been laid away for an extra year of maturing *(NHL 2K10)*? Either way, you'll get an enjoyable experience.

This year, the *2K* series is regaining its hockey toehold. The on-ice action is easy to grasp and superbly animated. In fact, the whole thing looks terrific. And off-the-puck checks and challenges add spice and context to your games, whether they're quick matches against the AI, online play, or even co-op games with a buddy.

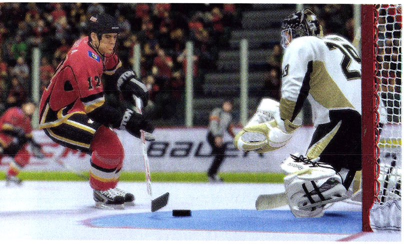
The camera perspective lets you see plenty of ice, and at that distance each deke, check, or stick poke looks smooth and realistic. Plus, in the post-game wrap-up, you can view a slideshow of stills—photos of the action—highlighting each player's accurate likeness and the full range of body torques and twists (but where's the option to upload to your *2K* blog site like you can with franchise stats and details?)

Controlling the action in *2K10* is fundamentally a simple press-X-to-pass-and-Square-to-shoot format, but the ability to check both on the boards and in open ice using the Circle button makes for a punchier, more combative approach. You get a lot of player-dictated checks, but not every push leads to a punch-up. Fighting is possible, but only if you choose to accept it. Overall, it's fun. Flattening a streaking winger or having your own players checked into next week creates memorable moments and a dynamic flow to the puck movement.

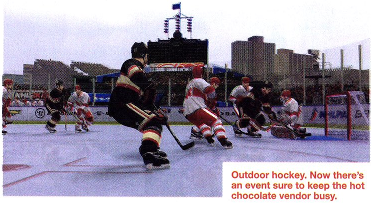
Generally, the AI plays an effective game. Rather than going check crazy to try and win possession, the AI passes the puck around realistically, probing for an opportunity if you're just sitting in the defensive zone. The franchise mode also involves more trading options and negotiations than we're used to seeing from AI GMs.

So *NHL* or *2K,* you can't go too wrong. Both games, if you're not a hockey fan, reinforce the skill, power, and fast-paced action that hardcore fans understand but so many other sports nuts simply miss. 2K's NHL game is still maturing—it needs another year of fine-tuning to release its full flavor—but still, you won't be disappointed if you partake of it now. Rob Smith

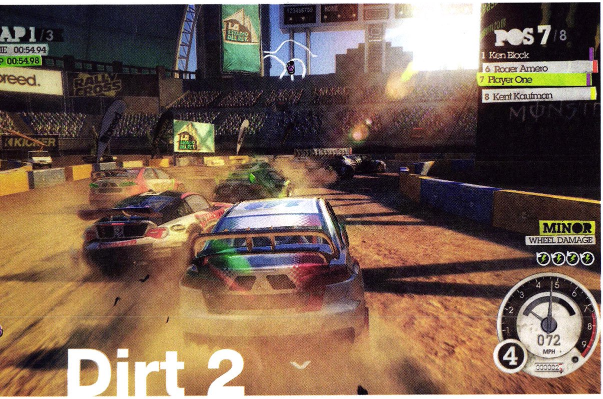
★★★★

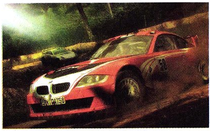


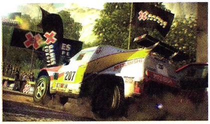
This play will be over in a split second, but you can take your time and savor it during the post-game wrap-up show.

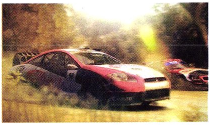


Outdoor hockey. Now there's an event sure to keep the hot chocolate vendor busy.









Look at that dust fly. If your car stays all pristine and gorgeous, you're not racing the right way.

Dirt 2

Let the filth come over you...in a totally good, racing kind of way

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Codemasters **DEVELOPER:** Codemasters Studios

PS3 | R

The original *Dirt* barely had time to rev its engine before critics lauded the title as a technical achievement in both authentic handling and real-time damage modeling. Of course, we're told that the physics have been overhauled to an even greater degree for *Dirt 2,* but since we don't play with a protractor, damned if we could tell—it felt great before, and it feels great now.

Luckily, the vast increase in gameplay variety is more than immediately apparent. Even if the meat of the last game was sweet and juicy, you were left with little more to do than hit timed checkpoints and shoot for first place. *Dirt 2* has seen fit to bestow us with wide-open endurance races, slalom-gate crashing, and some stadium-based rally cross that's a little more arcade in its indoor execution. But it's the great outdoors that remains the core of the *Dirt 2* experience, so modes like Trailblazer quickly won our hearts simply by offering the purest sensation of high velocity mud carving.

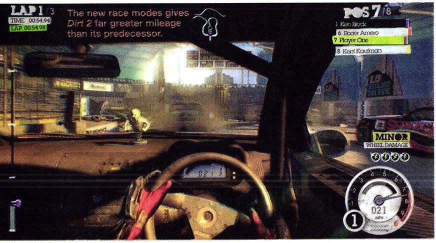
The graphics engine's brought along sights that'll truly astound, but don't let the eye candy fool you into thinking you're getting something sugarcoated. *Dirt 2* is hardcore. Few other racing games demand such rigorous finesse when feathering between gas and brake. The vicious hillside terrain is your archenemy, and it'll jump at every opportunity to flip your car like a coin. Thankfully, there are Flashback do-overs, enabling you to return to times of greater stability and eliminating the need for the player to constantly restart races after a minor snafu, ruining minutes of progress.

It feels like there are fewer cars to purchase this time around, but at least *Dirt's* unsurpassed relationship between vehicle and grime is as superb as it ever was.

However, rally purists may have a legitimate bone to pick with publisher Codemasters, who've branded the whole shebang with the X Games license in an apparent effort to make the sport more palpable to stateside audiences. At best, the branding isn't truly reflective of all the diverse off-road racing styles and series included in the game. At worst, it's tainted an immensely classy simulation franchise with the tiresome 'tude better suited for a bad *Tony Hawk* knockoff. Regretable, when just about every other racing game has ditched such tired affectations for a less annoying, streamlined approach. But thankfully, other than shortening events into quicker bursts, the only negative effects of Westernization are purely cosmetic...dude.

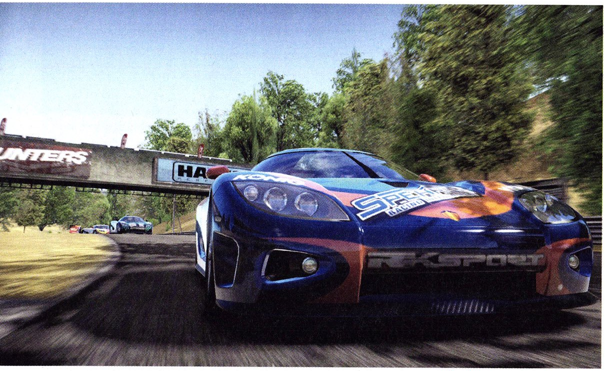
Chris Antista

★★★★

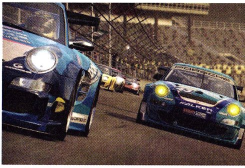


The new race modes gives *Dirt 2* far greater mileage than its predecessor.

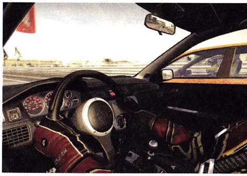
We're not in love with the X Games license, but the gameplay is fantastic.



Everything is gorgeously rendered, though you'll be speeding past too quickly to catch much of the detail.



If there's a more visceral racing game title on any platform, we haven't played it.



You'll get the full racing experience utilizing the exceptionally detailed cockpit view.

Need for Speed SHIFT

The slump is officially over—you really do need this speed

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Slightly Mad Studios

Two things both fans and newcomers to the long-running *Need for Speed* racing game series need to know: One, those screenshots you're seeing are an undoctored representation of actual gameplay behind the wheel. Absolutely gorgeous. And two, *SHIFT* is definitely the most "Sim" oriented the series has ever been. However, it also introduces some wildly immersive arcade elements with a modern rewards-based progression that lovingly panders to the Trophy whore in all of us.

How does *SHIFT* evolve past the overreliance on pole position that inevitably leads to more agonizing restarts than finishes? By acting like a doting mother and rewarding you for anything you do right. Maybe you can't make first place, sweetie...but you can still master turns, drift into controlled slides, comb a clean section, draft opponents, spin cars out, or perform about a billion other mid-race milestones that, once you've been given points for executing them, can more than make up for a fourth place finish.

Certain points break down into either Precision or Aggressive driving, but it hardly matters since success in either will result in more XP to your driver profile. And while unlocking cars and events through earning XP points, stars, and performance badges is already a streamlined approach well worth applauding, there's a greater benefit to this approach. Awarding your smaller successes oh-so subtly teaches the fundamentals of masterful driving in a way that simply winning first place never could.

Sure, you've also got licensed vehicles aplenty, as well as paint and vinyl customization, but *SHIFT* is less concerned with super-realism and far more focused on the actual driver experience. Whether you're shifting gears in cockpit view, experiencing tunnel vision at high velocities, or whiplashing your neck against a guardrail at 80 mph, the manner in which you feel life through the driver's eyes is a glorious kick to the senses.

Jarring concussions, momentary losses of vision (simulated, that is), and the inability to see course guidelines aren't merely fodder. They also provide an incentive for you to improve as a wheelman whether you realize it or not. Because a champ doesn't take turns against a guardrail.

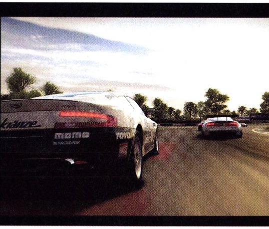
Gone are the glitter-coated gangsta whips, inner city stereotypes, and open-world storylines that have deluded the series for half a decade. Instead, Slightly Mad Studios has produced the most substantial upgrade the *NFS* series has ever received, along with the some of the best visuals in the genre's field. *Need for Speed SHIFT* avoids the pitfalls of other straightforward racers simply by providing a consistent and worthwhile incentive to push further, while also enabling players of any skill to ease into a comfortable difficulty. Kudos, indeed.

Chris Antista

★★★★½

Shifting Online

Our time with *NFS SHIFT's* multiplayer pretty much mirrored our experience with the single player. And yes, that's a good thing. Your offline stats serve as an online matchmaker, plus all the cash and point spoils will count toward your overall driver profile as you challenge friends in modes like Mixed Race, Time Attack, and Manufacturer Races.



Mini Ninjas

Because smaller is better...sometimes

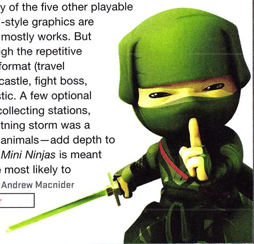
PS3 PRICE: **$49.99** ESRB: **Everyone 10+** PUBLISHER: **Eidos Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **IO Interactive**

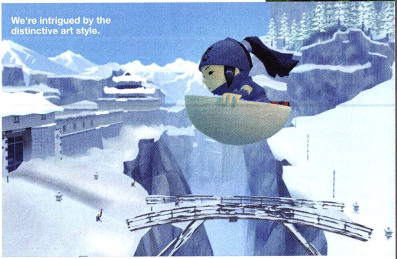
Mini-donuts, mini-cupcakes, and mini-cheeseburgers: what do these things have in common? They're all better when bite-sized. How about cutesy action adventure mini-ninjas? Sure... some of the time.

The story, for it's part, is typical: an empire that's lived in peace for centuries is suddenly haunted by an evil it banished ages ago. Mystical *kuji* magic has been unleashed, and it's your job as the ninja Hiro to harness that magic, rescue several of your ninja friends, and save the world.

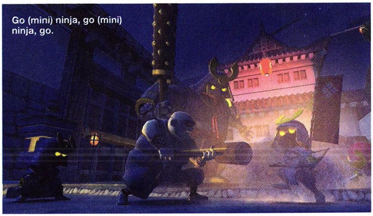
Leveling up as Hiro (or any of the five other playable ninjas) is satisfying, the mini-style graphics are cute, and the simple humor mostly works. But these benefits barely outweigh the repetitive action and predicable level format (travel here, rescue ninja, infiltrate castle, fight boss, repeat). It's all rather simplistic. A few optional elements—potion-making, collecting stations, learning new *kuji* spells (lightning storm was a favorite), and changing into animals—add depth to the game, but it's clear that *Mini Ninjas* is meant for a younger audience, one most likely to adore what it has to offer. Andrew Macnider

★★★



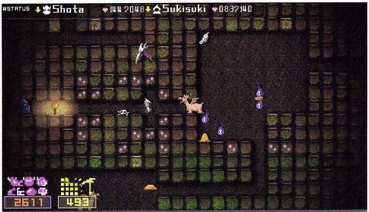


We're intrigued by the distinctive art style.



Go (mini) ninja, go (mini) ninja, go.

PS3 | R
PSP | R



Dragon poop stuns enemies in place for a short while.

Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do to Deserve This?

Warning: Omnomnoms cause brain pain

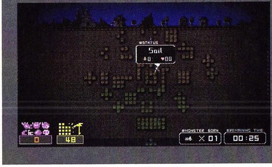
PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS America
DEVELOPER: Sony Computer Entertainment, Acquire

When it comes to *Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do to Deserve This?,* YouTube is your friend. You need it, if you want any hope of completing the game. Here's why: *Badman* has a learning curve so steep it makes the sides of the Grand Canyon look like a wheelchair ramp.

Badman's a blend of tower defense (your goal: stop enemies from reaching your Overlord), real-time strategy (you harvest limited resources to create troops), and ecosystem simulation (your troops are "bred" with nutrients you circulate around the dungeon and they eat each other to get stronger)—and you accomplish all of these tasks with your single ability, digging. You carve paths to reach nutrient-rich spots to breed troops, while mindful that enemies might never even march through those areas if you didn't build your dungeon effectively. It's difficult to grasp. And that's where the YouTube videos come in: you need inspiration and guidance on the best dungeon-crafting strategies.

Badman's core mechanic is frustrating in that you can't directly control your troops, so it feels like luck plays as much a role as skill. But if you put in the effort and get it—figure out which troops to upgrade and when, learn how to position rooms, understand enemy pathing, etc.—then you'll relish *Badman's* difficult Challenge stages and its arcade-style Story mode. Teresa Dun

★★★½



You have a limited amount of "dig power," so you need to construct your dungeon accordingly.

What's that smell?

Originality

talk radar
WEEK OF BABES
gamesradar WEEK OF HATE 2009
TOP 7 EVERY MONDAY
games radar
WHAT'S THAT SMELL? ORIGINALITY
FRESH GAMING CULTURE
STRONGEST BOREDOM-FIGHTING FEATURES ANYWHERE • MOST WIN PER CAPFUL OF ANY GAME SITE • BRILLIANCE AND MADNESS IN EVERY PODCAST • GETS SCREENSHOTS BRIGHTER • SPECIALLY BLENDED VIDEOS • LEAVES BRAIN SOFT AND REFRESHED

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PlayStation Network

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Pinching Pennies with PSN

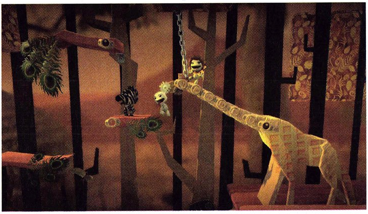
PTOM's guide to gaming on the cheap

The economy's about as healthy as a virally-infected zombie leper with the sniffles, yet a vast line-up of must-have holiday titles looms, taunting us with wallet-siphoning price points. What's a gamer to do during such desperate times? Why not fire up the PS3, login to the PlayStation Network, and follow these recession busting tips for good gaming on the cheap? We've got your stimulus package, right here, pal! BY MATT CABRAL

x50
BRONZE MEDAL: 450,000
HIGH SCORE: 10,000

Night of the Living Budget

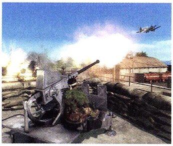
Blasting zombies should cost your brain, but not an arm and a leg. *Resident Evil 5* is fine, but it doesn't have the monopoly on undead hordes. For under $20, *Zombie Apocalypse* and *Burn Zombie Burn* both offer tons of arcadey fun complemented by plenty of over-the-top ways to turn the living dead inside out.



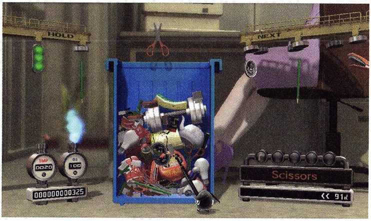
Games that keep on giving

If you want bottomless entertainment at bargain prices look no further than *Rock Band* and *LittleBigPlanet*. From whole albums to themed track packs, the former offers a virtual jukebox of reasonably priced tunes, while the latter boasts over a million free-to-play user-created levels just waiting to test your Sackboy's jumping, pushing, and—let's be honest—slapping your friends in the face skills.

Full-price fun at a bargain price



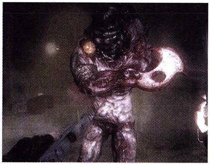
Few PSN games feel as much like they were ripped from a retail box as *Battlefield 1943*. The WWII-themed multiplayer experience that's been keeping mouse-and-keyboard jockeys twitching for years comes to PSN with all the expected competitive modes and—now that the servers are upgraded—performance. The $14.99 price and current-gen visuals powering all those blazing bullets and bomb drops can't be beat. Similarly, *Ratchet and Clank Future: Quest for Booty* gives you a short, but gorgeous and deep action game for just a few bolts ($14.99).



Transformers therapy for just $4.99

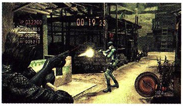
Not many gamers or geeks left screenings of this summer's *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* with kind words on their tongues. Believe us, we feel your pain, and while we can't get you your $10 or 2.5 hours back, we can suggest some *Trash Panic* therapy. The quirky Japanese puzzler has you compacting garbage into unrecognizable bits; it's loads of fun, and if you can imagine every piece of crap you're crushing, burning, or exploding is one of Michael Bay's dearest possessions, it can be quite therapeutic.

Don't buy it, try it!

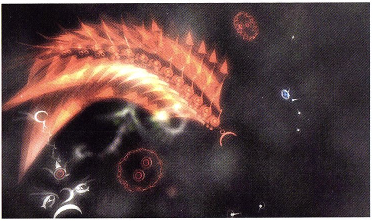


Demos are meant to lure us into buying a full game—tease us with a free taste, and we'll happily pay up for another helping. But it doesn't have to be that way; hell, you could kill a whole weekend just playing free chunks of games. And, while new releases garner all the buzz, you'd be shocked at what little known demos lurk within PSN's depths. Bet you didn't know there was a *Turok* demo still floating around, didja? How about *Clive Barker's Jericho?* These underachievers aren't necessarily worth their current bargain bin prices, but hey, blasting a few demons and dinos for free? Now you're talking. Plus, it doesn't have to be just the full-priced stuff—downloadable titles like *Savage Moon* and *The Last Guy* also have free bite-sized samples to help satisfy your game cravings.

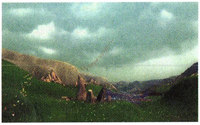
Game maximization



Just because you've finished a game or maybe grew bored with it doesn't mean it's dead; PSN add-ons can often breathe new life into your old games. It's likely you've played the hell out of *Killzone 2* and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare,* but have you checked out all the new map packs and bundles on PSN? You can add some online competition to *Resident Evil 5* with a $4.99 Versus pack. Of course, if blasting buddies isn't your thing, you can head back to Rapture's soggy depths and tax your brain as well as your thumbs in *BioShock's* challenge rooms ($9.99). It's not just the megahits, either. Underrated gems like *Red Faction: Guerrilla* and *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood* both offer additional ways to tear up Mars and the Old West, respectively.



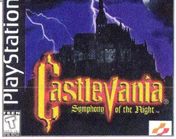
Relax *and* save money



Ambient games *flOw* ($7.99) and *Flower* ($9.99) are not only two of the most unique and addictive experiences on PSN, they're also as calming as a picnic in a meadow. The former takes you on an artsy aquatic journey in which your little critter absorbs other critters, while the latter lets you control the wind—with the Sixaxis—piloting airborne flower petals through equally easy-on-the-eyes outdoor environments. You'll become so immersed in the light puzzling and serene settings, you might even forget you're having super-cheap ramen noodles for dinner...again.

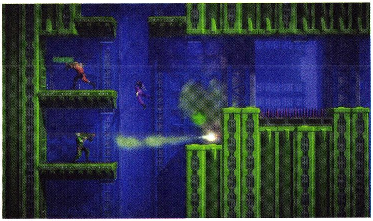
PlayStation
FINAL FANTASY VII
TEEN
SQUARESOFT

PlayStation
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR SOLID
MATURE
KONAMI

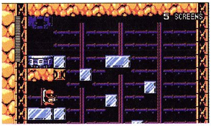


Still classic...and now they're cheap

You can hit PSN for some sweet deals on classic titles without having to wade through the game store's used bin or endure "Dude, you gotta reserve every game you want for the next two years or you'll never get them, I swear" sales pitches. There are nearly 50 PSone entries available for download right this moment, beginning at $5.99. And many, like—*Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy VII, Resident Evil: Director's Cut, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*—are well worth a play even if the graphics look a little rough these days.



Kick it old/new school



Some of the best offerings on PSN are from franchises that hooked us on games in the first place. Back in the day, it was the likes of *Mega Man* and *Bionic Commando* that kept us up way past our bed times. Both classic franchises have landed on PSN, offering unique takes on their classic formulas. *Mega Man 9* really sings with nostalgia, offering all the fighting and platforming the franchise is famous for, but with visuals that look like they just slipped out of an 8-bit cartridge. *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* swings in with a slightly different approach; it's more a remake of the game that put the franchise on the map, only with beefed-up, current-gen visuals. Both titles are a steal at $9.99. And if there's classic PC gaming in your past, a measly $4.99 will get you *Wolfenstein 3D.* This granddaddy of the FPS genre packs in mountains of undead Nazis—possibly the most shootable enemies in gaming history.

Put it on lay-away

Many downloadable games are offered in episodes or chapters, so you can play—and pay—as you go. *Watchmen: The End is Nigh Part 1* and 2 (though not the finest game, admittedly) and *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain Soaked Precipice of Darkness Episode 1* and 2 both offer partial games at just $14.99. But our favorite is the underrated *Siren: Blood Curse.* Its 12 chapters, sold in three four-part chunks for $12.99 a pop, offer some of the juiciest survival horror scares on the market. With a haunted village, a creepy tale, multiple playable characters, and a *Blair Witch*-like presentation, *Siren: Blood Curse* will have you hooked until the very last corpuscles-curdling scream.

PSN Video Delivery Service

Joel McCale: Gamer Interruptus

If you're so into gaming that you don't recognize Joel McCale from E's reality show wrap-up *The Soup*, perhaps you remember him as the charismatic fellow who hosted Ubisoft's 2009 E3 Press Conference. As if that didn't already make for an impressive year, Joel's also landed the starring role in *Community,* a new comedy from the folks behind *The Sarah Silverman Program* and *Arrested Development,* premiering this fall on NBC and VDS. So, how exactly *does* he make time for his PS3?

PTOM: You have two sons and a flourishing stand-up career, you host the *The Soup* and now you're starring in a new show called *Community,* coming to NBC this fall...

Joel McCale: So when do I have time to play games?! I'm halfway through *inFamous,* and I'm about to start *Prototype.*

Back to back? They're extremely similar.

I know but I love games like that. Two crazy dudes running around a city that's falling apart...did they plan for those to come out together?

Who knows? But it did spark quite the debate on the Internet.

"How dare you?! *Prototype* rules!" "No, *inFamous* is the best—shut up!" This is important for us to be arguing about. I loved *inFamous* even though I'm usually into shooters like *Brothers in Arms, Call of Duty,* the *Ghost Recons.* Since both *inFamous* and *Prototype* have such huge worlds, I'm like "When am I going to have time to finish this?" Maybe when my kids go to college.

Speaking of college...

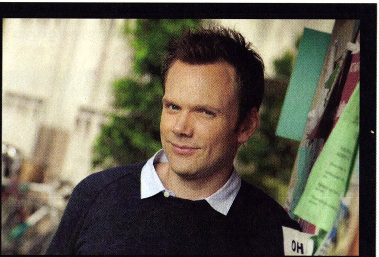
Yes! *Community,* coming up on September 17th. It's about a guy, me, who has been lying and cheating his way through law. He has no bachelor's degree and the state bar finds out and says, "You've got four years to get a degree or you're done." So he goes to community college because he believes, A) It's easiest and B) There's a professor there he successfully defended for a DUI. And he figures that professor owes him. Of course he asks the professor to give him all the answers, to which he says "yes," but since the professor's a drunk he doesn't get them. So for the first time in this guy's life he's forced to actually work.

I hope this doesn't mean you'll be leaving *The Soup?*

It's great, actually. I basically go in for one evening a week now. So *[Community]* lets me out of shooting early on Thursdays, and I get to work around 6:00 or 7:00 in the evenings and we shoot it right after that. I do all the other work remotely, sending jokes through the computer. But I can't watch TV the way I used to. Thank God there's 13 other people at *The Soup* who can watch stuff and tell me about it.

Are you still going to find time to perform stand-up at this point?

I don't think so. That would be suicide, I think. I've got a few gigs lined up. I'm doing Reno over Labor Day and a couple of colleges. There just aren't enough hours in the day. When the series goes back on hiatus I'll go back on the road. I just can't really physically do it. As with many single camera shoots, on Friday nights you end up shooting until four in the morning.

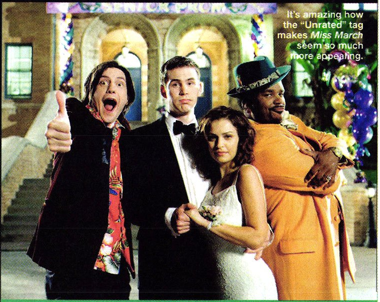


I have to say... I really don't see you ever getting around to finishing *Prototype.*

[Sighs] I can't imagine. Sometimes I'll come home and be like, "Oh, I'll just play for a half-hour." But you can't just play *inFamous* for a half-hour! Then it's 2:00 in the morning and I'm going to get four hours of sleep. Maybe I'll get a nap at lunch. Problem is I have to go home and go over lines for the next day. I'm just gonna have to rely on my PSP.

The first Community *episode will be available on VDS on September 11th, a week before its debut on live TV. The episode will be full price, but free from the 18th through the 25th after it airs on NBC.*

TOP VDS DOWNLOADS



It's amazing how the "Unrated" tag makes *Miss March* seem so much more appealing.

MOVIES

Miss March – UNRATED
Dragonball Evolution
Watchmen
Obsessed
17 Again

TV SHOWS

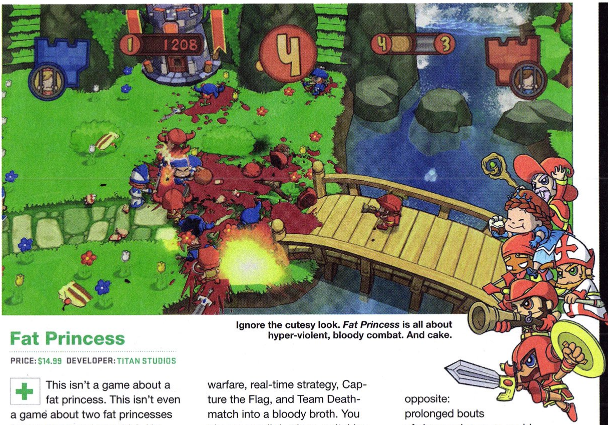
Family Guy | Season 7
Dexter | Season 3
Robot Chicken
Devil May Cry | Season 1
South Park: Uncensored

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of a family-sized strawberry shortcake. We say yea or nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.



Ignore the cutesy look. *Fat Princess* is all about hyper-violent, bloody combat. And cake.

Fat Princess

PRICE: $14.99 **DEVELOPER:** TITAN STUDIOS

+ This isn't a game about a fat princess. This isn't even a game about two fat princesses (one rotund royal per side). No, this is a game about the little people—the literally stump-sized warriors, wizards, rangers, workers, and priests who toil away to get that damned princess out of trouble. They do the hard work, and die en masse, while Miss Cakeface sits there stuffing her gob.

Don't let the cute art style give you the wrong impression. *Fat Princess* has the hyperactive charm of a children's cartoon… liberally smeared with violence and blood. Behind its simplistic exterior lies an innovative concept that blends equal parts siege warfare, real-time strategy, Capture the Flag, and Team Deathmatch into a bloody broth. You play as one little chap, switching hats constantly to change job titles from warrior to worker, etc., while 31 other players (human or CPU-controlled) do exactly the same. You need the worker to gather resources, repair defences, and upgrade your units; you need the others to storm the enemy stronghold and rescue your royal Fatness—or kidnap the other one, depending on the game mode.

With so many players and such variety to the classes, teamwork is key. Your natural instinct may be to run headlong into the fray, but you can usually help your side more by standing back and planning things out. Now, in our experience, matches tend to devolve into the exact opposite: prolonged bouts of chaos, where you could easily grab the princess and win if a few units worked together. On one occasion we spent 20 minutes trying to storm the enemy castle on our own, while our AI comrades fought hard over a useless outpost.

Maybe it's down to beginner players' lack of experience, but online play feels messy. But when you find a good match, with good people, it's sublime. Freeing the princess is like pulling off a heist, tense and unpredictable and immensely satisfying. But, unfortunately, finding a decent bunch of fellow players is half the battle.

We laughed out loud several times during *Fat Princess,* and not just at the fat jokes. It's enjoyable and quite a good value (though not as big a multi-player bargain as *Battlefield 1943).* Sadly, the single player is too short and too chaotic to be essential, so if you're considering *Fat Princess,* buy it for the multiplayer.

Tom Sykes

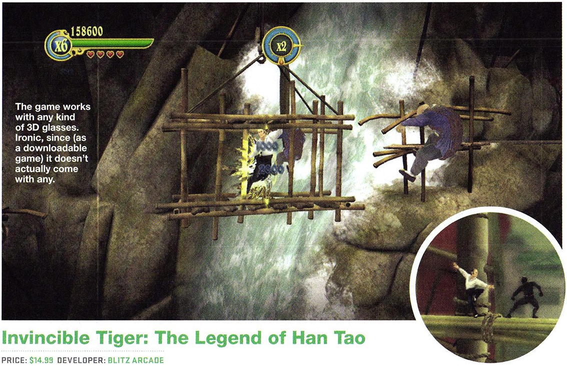
A full squad of smart players is great to have, but oddly tough to find.

Fat Princess is special because…

1. There's nothing quite like it. Even the more standard modes like Team Deathmatch and Invasion are given fresh twists due to the top-down perspective, the cartoon style, and the simple RTS elements. Also, you get to turn people into poultry.

2. It's unpredictable and at the moment, chaotic, but that does mean there's plenty of anecdotes to be had. Catapults mean that seconds after snatching a princess you can be flying through the air with a horde of airborne soldiers in tow.

3. It encourages teamwork. Even if communication can be difficult on PSN, it's refreshing to play a multiplayer title where you can't do everything on your own. Working together to achieve a common goal leads to rewarding matches…



The game works with any kind of 3D glasses. Ironic, since (as a downloadable game) it doesn't actually come with any.

Invincible Tiger: The Legend of Han Tao

PRICE: $14.99 DEVELOPER: BLITZ ARCADE

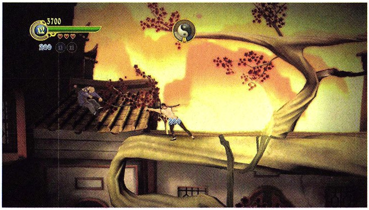
− Games in 3D: it could just be a gimmick. Then again, it could be a sign of things to come. Either way, first things first: if you only own a pair of colored 3D glasses (the red-blue kind), don't even try playing *Invincible Tiger: The Legend of Han Tao* in 3D. You'll only get a headache and temporary eyesight problems. If, however, you own a pair of digital 3D glasses (the clear-ish kind) and a high-end TV that supports Digital 3D, you'll enjoy quaint diorama style graphics that pop and flow as you pummel your way through a half-dozen stages. But chances are, you're not that much of a technophile, so you'll just stick to the normal—but still pretty—non-3D graphics. That's fine too.

Invincible Tiger's a beat-'em-up set in ancient China. The controls are a bit odd. There's the typical punches, kicks, and jumps linked to the face buttons, but to block, you either move your Right-analog stick up (to spin and avoid low attacks) or down (to crouch and avoid high attacks). Your thumbs will fumble as you try to learn the system, but then you'll notice that attacks are color-coded. If an enemy's hands flash yellow, you need to duck. If they flash blue, you need to jump. It makes combat a bit too straightforward.

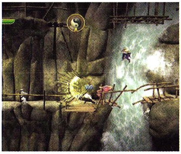
You also have a Yin Yang meter, which activates "Hyperstate," a special mode that increases the speed and strength of your attacks. Each time you block, you gain some dark energy in the Yin Yang meter. Each time you attack, you earn light energy in your meter. The point is to keep the two balanced, to maximize your Hyperstate time, which means you have to patiently dodge attacks (when you could just finish the enemies off in two hits) just to balance your meter.

Overall, if you want to take a peek at the first 3D PS3 game, *Invincible Tiger* could be worth your money. But if you don't have a pair of digital 3D glasses and a 3D-ready TV, there are better action games on which you could blow 15 bucks.

Teresa Dun



The downside of 3D is that the glasses tend to turn these gorgeous colors into shades of green or gray.



On the bright side, the ability to see characters literally get knocked out of your TV screen is pretty cool.

WHAT'S IN STORE?

Our picks of recent must-buy add-ons from the PlayStation store

Call of Duty: World at War
Map Pack 3

PRICE: $9.99

Zombies return. Need we say more? (Fine, the oceanic "Battery" map is also pretty darn fun.)

Savage Moon
Waldgeist Add-On

PRICE: $4.99

Two new towers, six new levels, two new enemy types, a jungle-y new setting, new music, and brand new Trophies. But same tough difficulty level. Whew.

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood
Old West Map Pack

PRICE: $9.99

If you own *Bound in Blood* and enjoy multiplayer, you must get this add-on. These four new maps are the best the game has to offer.

Letters Feedback, Insight, Gettin' Firm, and *Fallout* Fallout

173

Number of music game songs played by PTOM staff this month

31

Number of bosses defeated during the making of this issue

2

Number of controllers thrown in a fit of rage this month

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Am I the only one who thought that *Fallout 3* was too big of a game? I played it for maybe 10 hours, and by then, I was overwhelmed by the amount of things that were available to me. I agree that open-ended, decision-making sandbox games are great *(Oblivion* being one of my favorites), but where do they draw the line? Remember the good old days when RPGs were more linear and could actually keep people interested? I just hope that games don't end up like real life, where we're plagued by life-altering decisions that cannot be changed unless we replay the whole game (wouldn't it be great if life was so convenient?).

Florian, via email

We agonize over those "life-changing" decisions too, Florian. Like, Amata's dad is such a jerk, but do we really need to kill him? What if she hates us for it? Games like *Fallout* can be totally stressful, man! We always just cheat and create a bunch of quick-saves along the way so we can test the various outcomes of our decisions. But you know they still make linear RPGs too, right? We could all just save ourselves the hassle of thinking and pick up a nice copy of *Persona 4*.

STICK TO YOUR GUNS

The only reason I haven't purchased a PSP is because of the lamentable lack of a second analog stick. I was super excited to read that a new design was in the works, thinking that the smart people at Sony would fix this little mishap that's been talked about since the PSP first came out. But

LETTER OF THE MONTH

THE FIRMWARE AVENGER

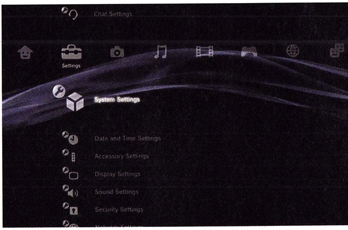
This is in response to Tacozed's letter in the August 2009 Letters section, in which he basically tried to rip Doyle41 a new one because Doyle's from the boonies. What Tacozed failed to realize is that you do not need a high-speed Internet connection to download the latest firmware update. While it may take a long time, Doyle could go to the library or to school, download the latest update to an SD card or USB drive, and update his firmware that way. Here's the link if you need proof:

http://www.us.playstation.com/Support/SystemUpdates/PS3

This may not help Dolye get his beloved online Trophies, but it will still allow him to have the firmware for the Trophy system. Also, some game discs may actually have a system update included on them, depending on when they were released. Tacozed should check his facts first before trying to belittle someone. I'm also surprised that the editors didn't pick up on this mistake and correct him. After all, isn't this magazine supposed to help us all learn how to get the most out of our systems?

RR, Raleigh NC

"You could go to the library or to school, download the latest update to an SD card or USB drive, and update your firmware that way." →



You're totally right, RR. It is possible to download firmware directly from the PlayStation website, certain games do indeed come pre-loaded with the latest updates, and we should have pointed that out when we printed Tacozed's letter. Being city dwellers, we've always enjoyed high-speed internet access, so we tend to take our firmware-updating abilities for granted. Fortunately, we've got an amazing community of readers who can keep us honest when we slip up. You've provided a great service for all those gamers who live in the boonies, RR! But if you embarass us again...

NOOOOOOOO! Still no foreseeable chance of playing an FPS on the PSP. What gives?

Mranvhel, El Paso TX

Well, Mranvhel, it turns out that analog sticks have become an endangered species in recent years, and therefore, all newly-released consoles will be limited to just one stick. It's not a misguided design decision; Sony is simply following environmental regulations! At least, that's what we heard.

"THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN DRINKING…"

Where am I and why do I look like a pilot? Holy crap!!! How much did I drink last night?!!??!

Kyle, via email

Wherever you are, let's just hope you didn't fly there.

MUSIC TO KILL BY

Maybe it's just me, but I feel like game developers are not allowing me to use my PS3 to its full potential. Specifically, I am almost never allowed to play the MP3s on my system during gameplay. Is it a crime to want to blast "Master of Puppets" while I hunt down the enemy in *CoD4?* Is it irresponsible to have Arch Enemy complement my assault on zombie hordes in *RE5*? Nothing against a game's soundtrack, but I would like the option to play my own music from time to time. I mean, this is America, right?

Grant Noblin, via email

Honestly, Grant, it might be irresponsible *not* to listen to Arch Enemy while blowing holes in zombies. In fact, we think there should be some kind of ordinance mandating the use of heavy metal when engaging zombies in combat. So yes, it's a shame that many developers omit music playback features from their games (the functionality is there, developers just have to implement it). Until this practice becomes more common, just turn the game music down in the pause menu and keep your stereo handy.

HOMELESS

Living in the uncharted woods of rural Ireland, I've only recently taken my PS3 online. After browsing the PlayStation Store and downloading a few demos and games, I thought I'd give *Home* a try, and boy was it depressing. Like some kind of surreal David Lynch-style postmodern art film, groups of sexually aggressive 12-year-old boys chase other 12-year-olds pretending to be girls in gaming's weirdest, most sterile environment. It's like a waiting room, but with bubble machines and dancing. It does have some redeeming features though. Moving furniture around and sitting on benches can be exhilarating.

Oh, and $1.99 for a virtual T-shirt? Ridiculous. I guess my real problem is with how good it could have been. Regardless of this, I do occasionally log in to join the "running man" dance collective and bask in the diverse culture from which I quote the following chatlog: "Hi." "Hi." "Where are you from?" "MY KNOB IS ENORMOUS." Beautiful, eh?

John McMahon, via email

Yes, in many ways *Home* feels like an inflexible, dated version of PC social hub *Second Life.* Even so, it is not without promise. Consider events like the recent ARG (alternate reality game) *Xi,* which saw the community of over half a million people banding together to solve puzzles. That should be the focus—more fun, community-oriented projects and less monetizing of digital items. We have faith in you, *Home,* so come on!

Follow me.
Where is everyone?
Lets go to your HomeSpace.
Ohhhh stoo
I'm getting my groove on
scee-paulr
scee-swaugaman
ThreeRadicals

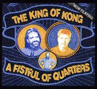
PTOM: CASUALLY UNRAVELING THE FABRIC OF TIME

I was casually reading the Editor's Note after I had finished the rest of the magazine (yes, it's the last page I read), and everything was fine until I read this sentence: "Blah blah blah August issue blah blah blah." I thought, "Dang. August already. Aww dang, school again!" Then it hit me: "Wait a minute…it's still July. If last issue was August, then this issue must be…" *GASP* I quickly threw the magazine closed and looked along the spine. "Aha!" I exclaimed as I read the words *"September 2009"* printed clearly on the side of the magazine. "Those silly PTOM-ers," I said to myself. "They're getting ahead of themselves." Then a cold sad truth melted upon me: If you continue at this insane rate, we'll be magazine-less by October. Either that or we'll have an awkward New Year's issue by Halloween. Soon you'll be reviewing games that never came out, moving quickly throughout time. In the distant future, you may even be reviewing games before they're even pitched to the game companies. Your magazine could be the downfall of all modern gaming!

Sam Clark, CA

Don't worry, Sam, there's a method to our madness. Unlike

Reader Haikus!



Mitchell has the crown
For being King of the Kong
Steve Wiebe eats crow!
– Willie Zollicoffer

Down front down front punch
The Revenge Meter was full
Knock out, Ryu wins!
– Eric Wong

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
AVATAR
THE GAME

P-T-O-M staff
Working on this magazine
Akatosh bless ye
– Nick Lacasse

Mounting frustration
Intense bliss of victory
Platinum trophy
– Joshua King Chapman

Want to see your poetry here? It's super easy! Just send your game-related haikus to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com with the subject line "Haiku." Remember, it's five syllables, then seven, then five again. Now get writing!

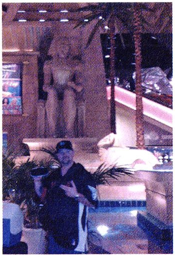
Overheard this month in the PTOM offices:

"I think there should be booth babes because then no one will harass me!"

Teresa Dun, Assistant Editor

The PSP World Tour Treks On!

When we first received these images from reader Mac Roth, we weren't sure what we were looking at. Then we read his letter: "I work for a company that does service on beverage equipment out here in the Bay Area called NorCal Beverage. I figured it'd be funny to show off my PSP inside a Slurpee barrel." Wait a minute…that *is* a PSP in there! Well done, Mac!



Reader Daryl White didn't imprison his PSP in a machine that dispenses delicious frozen drinks, but he did have a run in with a famous magician in Vegas: "I recently took a trip to Sin City with my wife. We left our kids behind, but I brought my PSP. We took it to David Copperfield, and luckily, he didn't make my PSP disappear."

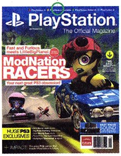
many magazines, we actually produce 13 issues per year—one every four weeks—rather than 12. This means that every issue should arrive slightly earlier than the one before it. By the end of the year, that time adds up and issues start arriving noticeably early. But right about then, the Holiday issue should arrive to even everything out. So don't let the date fool you; our evil plans for world domination have nothing to do with time manipulation. Robotic penguins with laser eyes, yes. Time? No.

HE'S GOT ISSUES

Is it weird that I keep all my PlayStation magazines month after month as if they're a baseball-card collection? I literally get upset when I find one of my mags in the trash (my wife says they "accidently" get thrown in there). Once I'm done reading the whole thing, I stick it in a drawer where I keep my other old issues. It's like I have OCD strictly with my magazines. Is something wrong with me?

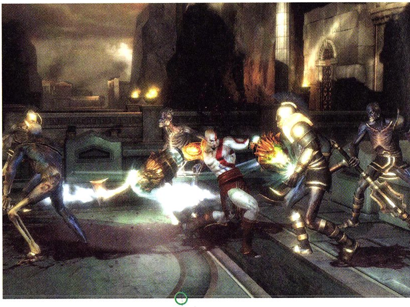
SweetP1983, via email

SweetP1983, there is absolutely nothing wrong with you—well, nothing that a new email name wouldn't fix, anyway. In fact, we think people who don't save all their magazines have a problem. Don't you want to treasure these works of art forever?!


PlayStation
The Official Magazine
Fast and Furious meets LittleBigPlanet
ModNation RACERS
Your next great PS3 obsession!
HUGE PS3 EXCLUSIVES

SKATE OR DIE

So a couple of Christmases ago, I got *Tony Hawk's Project 8.* I immediately booted up my PS3, pushed in the game, updated, and got ready to play. After five minutes of playing, my PS3 suddenly shut down…completely. The lights were off, but the on/off switch was set to "on." I stared, puzzled, reset the on/off switch, and booted it up again. Five minutes later, it happened again, so I just gave up. A few years later, I booted up the game again, thinking a software update may have helped.



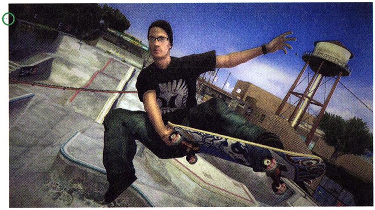
Same thing happened! However, this time it killed my PS3. My PS3 no longer even turns on. Do you have any idea what happened?

Wesley Small, NM

You know, it sounds like your copy of *Project 8* may be haunted. We recommend consulting an exorcist. But seriously, if you only experience problems when playing this specific game, then it is, in all the likelihood, defective. It's unusual that it could crater your entire system like that, but defective discs do happen. Contact Sony's customer service to have your PS3 resurrected (www.us.playstation.com/support), and email Activision about possibly having the disc replaced. It might be tough without proof of purchase, though, especially three years after the game came out. But it's worth a shot!

ONE HIT WONDERS

Don't take this the wrong way, but I begin to wonder what happens to the games that get covers—headlines in bold, snazzy fonts and 10 flashy pages in the Features section—but then are never heard from again. I'm referring to games like the recently featured *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2, God of War III,* and *Batman: Arkham Asylum.* I need to know: Are they closer to an official release date? Have the projects been delayed? Are the games complete but marketing is waiting



contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. 'cause we can't be doin' all the givin' month after month, page after page.

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for favorable signs from Hindu mystics? What's going on??? Now I'm not demanding you guys dedicate 12 pages to these games every single issue till they release, but I think you should at least follow up and give us something like a quick status update on a game you just convinced us we absolutely must have when it's released.

Modi, via email

If we don't mention a game for a while, it's generally because we don't have any new information to share with you! And that's true of all games, including the heavy hitters you find on our covers. So nothing "happens" to those games; we're just waiting until we can provide you with something new, whether it be a quick update in Gallery or the actual Review.

READING IS FOR SUCKERS

Okay, I have a suggestion for you guys: Sometimes my brain isn't in the mood to process a long review with big, detailed sentences. So what I want is a small box stating the pros and cons of the game next to the star rating. If a reader just wants to know what's good and bad about a game in a few words, this tool could be very handy.

Tim, via email

Good suggestion. Could take time to implement. Will consider. Thanks. (Those short enough for you, Tim?).

NORMAL PERSON + ANONYMITY + AUDIENCE...

I play my favorite games online, and I do believe it is an awesome experience overall. Sometimes, though, I find myself thinking the story modes of games can be more compelling than the supposedly "game-making" online multiplayer. Yes, story mode can have its flaws and playing with AI-controlled characters can get boring sometimes, but with all the team-killers and complete jackasses that inhabit online multiplayer these days, I can overlook those flaws. So anyway, do you guys think online multiplayer is slightly overrated?

Grant Watson, Scranton PA

It's all a matter of personal taste. Some people really enjoy the thrill of competition and find battling against real-life opponents to be far more satisfying...even if those opponents happen to be insufferable douche bags (though to be fair, we've had plenty of pleasant experiences on the PlayStation Network as well). Just remember that you should be able to mute the truly annoying players, and you can always switch servers if you've stuck in a match full of team-killers. Don't let them ruin the experience for you!

NINJA EDIT(OR)

Do you guys miss [ex-Executive Editor] Gary Steinman? He was pretty cool with the ponytail and katana, kinda like me.

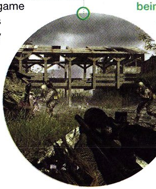
Max G, via email

Don't tell him we told you, but he never actually had a ponytail. What a phony, right? We do miss him, though. At least, until he wanders over to harass us every day. He still just works down the hall, you know.

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?

My friends and coworkers play *Call of Duty* nonstop. They think it's the only great game out there. It makes me upset that they call themselves gamers when the only games they know how to play are *CoD4* and *World at War*. Their *CoD* Gold Cross ranking means nothing to me in my gaming world. What's your suggestion for letting my friends know that they're not gamers, they're wannabes?

J.T. Mack, via Email



You don't really get how this whole "friends" thing works, do you?

LET THERE BE LETTERS

About how many letters/emails do you get every month on the average? Do you sometimes find yourselves in a shortage of letters and make up your own? Or do you find yourselves receiving way too many letters to even bother reading through them all?

George M, Dinuba CA

We don't really count how many letters we receive in total, but between email and snail mail, it's a ton. Interestingly, we also get lots of letters from inmates. Seriously. We've actually printed quite a few, though we generally omit the parts about prison life. But regardless of how many letters we get, we always appreciate more, especially if they're thoughtful or clever. Keep 'em coming, everyone!

BROTHERS IN ARMS

My brother is such a perfectionist! He blames me every time he dies in *Warhawk* or *Killzone 2* just because I'm in the room. He got a subscription to *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* for his birthday, so I just wanna piss him off by getting my letter printed. I really don't have anything else to say because I only really want bragging rights. P.S.—Can you write in your comments thing that he is a fat munchkin? Thank you!

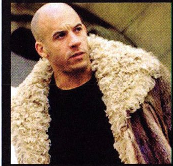
Matthew Kolzrud, via email

We're tempted to give you a verbal (well...written) lashing for being so passive-aggressive, but instead, we're going to offer you some sound advice: be nice to your brother! Even when he isn't always nice to you. You're going to be brothers for the rest of your lives whether you like it or not, so you should really make an effort to get along. Why not play games together? That could be an excellent start.

Our cover is blown!

A host of spies infiltrated the Reviews Intro page of September issue, but fortunately for us, several savvy readers were able to uncover the moles before they could do any real harm. This month's winning counterintelligence expert? Adam Phillips from the Internet! Check out this month's Intro page for another chance to win, but in the mean time, here are Adam's answers:

▲ "The first picture is the ever badass Jason Bourne (Matt Damon), who started out as a book character, but is much better known for being in *The Bourne Identity/Supremacy/Ultimatum* movies. And did we mention he's also badass?

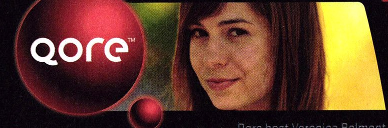


▲ Picture two is Xander Cage!!! He was Played by Vin Diesel in *XXX* and gahhh... It's so over the top and he shoots guys and boom!!! He jumps a car off bridge oer the top gaah!! (I didn't really like this movie.)

▲ The bottom picture: *Spies Like Us.* Oh Dan Aykroyd and Chevy Chase doing your comical spy movie. I never actually saw this one (thanks "I Love the '80s!") so I seriously have no idea how I even remembered that title.

So we got a tactical spy, AN OVER THE TOP GAAAHH! spy, and some comical spies. Can I have junk from Rob's desk?"

Yes. Well, the stuff we cleared off his old desk...



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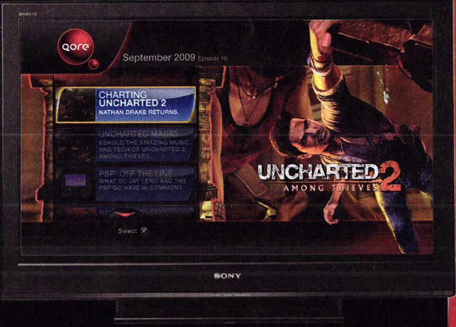
Featuring Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, PSPgo, and Brütal Legend


qore

September 2009 Episode 16

CHARTING UNCHARTED 2
NATHAN DRAKE RETURNS.

UNCHARTED MAGIC
BEHOLD THE AMAZING MUSIC AND TECH OF UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES.

PSP® OFF THE LINE
WHAT DO JAY LENO AND THE PSP®GO HAVE IN COMMON?

Select ✕

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, the most highly-awarded game of E3 2009, is Qore's focus this month, and we're giving you in-depth coverage like never before—interviewing Creative Director Amy Hennig, visiting picturesque Skywalker Ranch for the soundtrack recording session, and diving deep with a behind-the-scenes look at the technology that will bring this game-world to life.

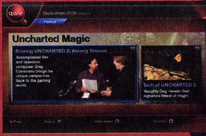
Featuring

Charting Nathan Drake's Course

Qore caught up with Creative Director Amy Hennig in a rare quiet moment to chat with her about Naughty Dog's amazing sequel to *Uncharted* that is set to push the boundaries of the PS3.

Uncharted Magic

Skywalker Sound has provided services for more than half of the top 25 highest-grossing films of all time. Composer Greg Edmondson went there to lead an 80-piece orchestra in the recording session for *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves'* soundtrack. Qore also takes a closer look at the new technology behind the game.


September 2009

Feature

Uncharted Magic

Scoring UNCHARTED 2: Among Thieves

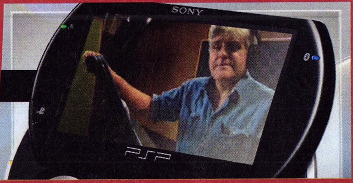
Accomplished film and television composer Greg Edmondson brings his unique perspective back to the gaming world.

Tech of UNCHARTED 2

Naughty Dog reveals their signature brand of magic.

PSPgo Test Drive

Veronica Belmont takes the new PSPgo handheld out on the town, while Audrey Cleo talks with automotive enthusiast Jay Leno about one of the most highly anticipated PSP games—*Gran Turismo*. Check out Jay's personal garage and learn about his contributions to the title.

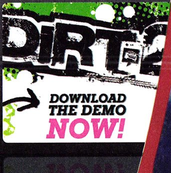


Rock 'n' Roll Will Never Die

We rush the stage at Double Fine and bang heads with *Brütal Legend* creator Tim Schafer and his crew—makers of what's sure to be one of the most original (and hilarious) games of the year.

Plus

All subscribers and purchasers of Episode 16 will receive access to the *Dirt 2* demo and an exclusive *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* PS3 theme. New subscribers will also receive *High Velocity Bowling* as a bonus. A 13-episode subscription to Qore is $24.99—only $1.92 an episode. Single episodes are also available to download for $2.99 from the PlayStation Store.



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